VIRGINIA'S HAND

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VIRGINIA'S HAND

A POEM

BY

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AUTHOR OF

'LETTERS OF A BETROTHED' 'EVELYN FORESTER' 'NELLY CAREW' ETC.

". . . . . Beloved, let us love so well,
Our work shall still be better for our love,
And still our love be sweeter for our work,
And both, commended, for the sake of each,
By all true workers and true lovers born"

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

LONDON

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1860

VIRGINIA'S HAND.

BOOK I.

CANTO I.

VIRGINIA'S HAND.

BOOK I.

CANTO I.

" And God's own profound
Was above me, and round me the mountains,
And under, the sea,
And within me my heart to bear witness
What was and shall be!
Oh heaven and the terrible crystal!
No rampart excludes
Your eye from the life to be lived
In the blue solitudes!"

ROBERT BROWNING.

" Oui, je suis le rêveur; je suis le camarade
Des petites fleurs d'or du mur qui se dégrade,
Et l'interlocuteur des arbres et du vent.
Tout cela me connaît, voyez-vous. J'ai souvent,
En mai, quand de parfums les branches sont gonflées,
Des conversations avec les giroflées;
Je reçois des conseils du lierre et du bluet;
L'être mystérieux, que vous croyez muet,
Sur moi se penche, et vient avec ma plume écrire.
J'entends ce qu'entendit Rabelais; je vois rire
Et pleurer; et j'entends ce qu'Orphée entendit.
Ne vous étonnez de tout ce que me dit
La Nature aux soupirs ineffables.

* * * * *

J'ai fini, grâce au calme en qui je me recueille,
A force de parler doucement à la feuille,
A la goutte de pluie, à la plume, au rayon,
Par descendre à ce point dans la création,
Cet abîme où frissonne un tremblement farouche,
Que je ne fais plus même envoler une mouche!
Le brin d'herbe, vibrant d'un éternel émoi,
S'apprivoise, et devient familier avec moi."

VICTOR HUGO.

VIRGINIA'S HAND.

BOOK I.

CANTO I.

In one who worships Beauty in all forms
The sight is quickened, learns to penetrate
Through all disguises, sees the self-same soul
Pervading, more or less, a million types
Oft varied in their semblance, as the shapes
Of Aphrodite and the loathsome hag,
The laidly Ladye of the chronicle.

Thence spring great joys, wondrous discoveries,
Strong sympathies, rare instincts, hints as strange,

Analogies, suggestions, liftings up
Though for a moment only, of the veil
Between the known and the yet unrevealed.

Would this were all — the only consequence
Of quickened vision; but in this wide world,
This wondrous world, where everything begins
And nothing ends, — this workshop, where we all
Must serve a stern apprenticeship to God,
Or else to Satan — which requires less pains, —
The good and evil are as closely mixt
As were the grains the jealous Paphian queen
Bid Psyche separate ere Hesper rose.

Great joys the love of Beauty brings; but ah!
The love of Beauty never dwells alone :
Still in the breast where she hath made her home

She ever gives large hospitality
To creatures whose one torment lies in this,
That they have wings too nerveless and too frail
Ever to bear them where their yearnings tend.
The purest and most long-lived leads the van,
Fervent-eyed Hope; a motley troop succeed,—
Breathless Desire, Ambition, Thirst of Fame,
Wild yearning of the Power to Produce
A perfect type of that the soul perceives
But the hand fails to fashion, or the lips
To give due utterance to. And Love is there,
Nearly divine, yet lab'ring like the rest
'Neath that same doom,—the weakness of his wings,
That after soaring, oft-times let him fall,
All faint and weeping, in the waters dark
Of a foul lake, the worst inhabitant
Of that same Lady's Castle, drear Despair,

Has spread to engulf all feebler sprites whose strength
Fails to enable them to reach the shore.

The Hero of my theme was one who bore
A soul thus fully peopled. From his birth
(Which orphan'd him, his Mother having died,
And her sad spirit, wandering alone
Among the shades, had sent a frightened cry
To pray his sire to join her,) he had lived
A dreamy life within a shepherd's cot
High up among the wide and windy hills,
Where God's breath blew upon him first and fresh,
Before it passed its way through other lungs,
And grew corrupted by their varied taints.

The hills were broad and barren, not a tree
Of all that nestled in the vales below

Ventured to climb up there. A stunted bush,
Through whose stiff foliage whirred the whistling
wind,
Sprung here and there upon the leeward side
Of some great boulder with pied lichens patcht.
A hardy flower—rare treasure for the boy—
All small and wind-beat though it was, found root
At distant intervals upon that turf
So close and green, where wild, small, fine-limbed
sheep,
As agile as the chamois, roved and grazed.

Beneath at one side spread the usual world;
Fields, farms, fair villages, from whence blue smoke,
The cuckoo's note, child-voices, reapers' songs
Would float up there, when on some stilly day
A faint land-breeze would bear them on its wings,

As messages that unknown world sent forth,
Kind greetings to the solitary child.

At the other side another world was spread,
Broad, boundless, trackless as Eternity.
It too had voices, whispers, messages,
That spoke in awful language to the child.
In Summer, when the days were warm and blue,
It's only sound was a soft, sighing swell,
Or a low lapping 'gainst the unyielding cliffs
That rose up sheer and stern from the world's roots.
In Autumn evenings, the winds 'gan to rise
And vex and fret the sea. Then from afar
Came on careering from the distant main
Foam-crownèd billows, swift, strong, uncontrolled,
Until they reached the rocks that would not yield,
A hair's breadth to their most impetuous course,

But stood before and braved them. Then they burst,
Recoiled, rusht on again to renew the charge,
In vain,—in vain the wrath, in vain the strength ;
And moaning, back they drew their baffled force,
Baffled, not vanquished.

Drearily came on
The long, mysterious, sullen Winter nights.
The child would lie and listen to the war
The waves', the wind's, and rain's combinèd arms
Would make upon the crags.

At times a lull
Of gathering husht the tumult ; then the wind
Whistled the signal of attack :—at once
The allied demon legions, shrieking, rusht
Upon the passive foe, the waves the worst,

The strongest and most desp'rate ; 'gainst the rocks
And in the hollows, he could hear — half feel —
The vast, dull, echoing shock their giant bulk
Stunned the black crags with, while aloft in air
Salt, snowy foam-flakes, scattered from the mass,
Were driven by the shrieking wind, and shred
Into mere mist.

These were the sights and sounds
That gathered round the cradle of the boy,
That soothed or awed his childhood. Playmates, toys,
He knew not even by name. The shepherd's wife
Who nurst and reared him kept him, half for love,
Half for the pittance that the chary hands
Of chilly-hearted kinsfolk portioned out,
That the child might not starve, or beg, or steal,

Until such time as *something* could be done
By *some* one to provide him with *some* means
Of earning *somewhat.*

Meanwhile the Babe grew
To childhood; not as children mostly are,
Gay, turbulent and rosy, with round limbs
And laughing eyes, quick feet and grasping hands,
Restless, destructive, fond of change, athirst
Of noise and motion, drinking in great draughts
Of life—the body all awake, the soul
Sleeping profoundly.

Not so was our boy.
Great, grey, large orbèd, deep-set, dreamy eyes,
Of little surface-lustre but vast depth,
Looked through black lashes 'neath the solemn shade

Of low, straight brows. An oval face, clean-cut,
Firm, clear and pale. An almost sensual mouth,
So full and rich and ruddy were the lips,
Yet saved from being quite so by the pure
And perfect shaping of the jaws and chin,
The expression of the brow, where sat enthroned
Imagination and Reflection grave —
Fair queens, each bearing her full share of sway.

Such children are not ever sturdy-limbed,
Nor very full of animal strong life,
Even when not unhealthy. At his birth
Arthur had been but weakly, and perhaps
Had he met gentler tending, pillowed soft
On his young Mother's breast, been husht to sleep
In a down cradle, guarded from the breath
Of every passing wind, the little life

That wanted bracing might have passed away
Stilly from out the little fragile frame.
Not such his lot. The nurse of Romulus
Must have been nigh as tender as our boy's:
She loved him, was not harsh, and fed him well;
But as to other tending, the strong lambs
That played with, butted him with their black fronts,
Then over-leapt him, sprawling on the turf,
Had quite as gentle rearing; mountain winds,
Unshaded sunshine, fitful summer show'rs,
Might do their pleasure: and right well he fared
With this same nursing; — straight, though slight of limb,
Agile, if not robust, and full of grace,
Like all hill creatures, grew the hill-reared child.
Within, too, all untended, all unnurst,
There spread a mightier growth,— a strong, large soul,

Deep, passionate, reflective, full of love,
Of wonder, questioning the earth, the sky,
The monstrous easy-angered sea, whose verge
Of fiery glory swallowed up the sun,
Sucked down the moon, and ever made him long
To reach it, that he might from thence behold
What region lay beyond the mortal world.
Sometimes a white sail came from thence, drew nigh;
Then passed away in silence; or a gull
With skimming wings, came up upon the cliff,
And circled round him as he lay at length
Watching the thick-piled, rounded layers of cloud
Hard-outlined 'gainst the intense-blue distant sky;
They saw, he knew, but would not tell the tale.

He knew there was a God, somewhere up there
Beyond those clouds, that sky; Mary, his nurse,

Had told him so: a Being very good
To all good children; therefore he must try
To be a good child always, that the love
Of that Great Being, who had made the sun,
The moon, the stars, the earth, the sea, — himself,
Might light on him, on him who lived up there
So near to Heaven, so lonely, so exposed
To God Almighty's clear and constant ken
He could not be forgotten, overlookt
In good or ill-doing, like the little ones,
His unknown brothers, in the vales below;
There were so many there! and they could hide
Amid the trees, beneath the hedges creep,
If ever they offended the Great God,
And lie forgotten till His wrath went by.
So much might he advantage: — yes, but then
God's love might also overlook them; he

For his part rather far would be assured
Of good from well-doing, than impunity
In doing evil. Thus he thought and lived
In sublime error, with transparent soul
And life of prayer in action, before God.

BOOK I.

CANTO II.

"Les anges se miraient en elle.
Que son bon-jour était charmant !
Le ciel mettait dans sa prunelle
Ce regard qui jamais ne ment.

A travers mes songes sans nombre,
J'écoutais son parler joyeux,
Et mon front s'éclairait dans l'ombre
A la lumière de ses yeux."

VICTOR HUGO.

BOOK I.

CANTO II.

THERE is a boon that God has given to men
For which but few are grateful,—most indeed
Far otherwise, — the boon of ignorance
Of that which lies before them on the earth
For good or evil. Where we cannot change
Our destinies, shall we desire to know
What miseries are sown along our path,
That all the thorns, foreseen, may choke and kill
The flow'rs, — the poison mar the wine, the tares
Smother the wheat ere ripe ? — that not a joy
Shall cast a radiance, for the dark eclipse
Thrown on it by the grief that lies beyond ?

God keep us from such knowledge: let us live
Our lives in earnest,—patient, hopeful, strong:—
The greatest cannot rule their destinies;
The least can rule their thoughts, their aims, their
deeds,
Fight the good fight of Free-will, do whate'er
God and their conscience bid, looking up straight
To where in sober glory sit enthroned
Duty and Truth; assured that in the end
Strong, loving hands will be stretcht down to them,
A powerful and loving voice proclaim,
"Well done, well done, thou good and faithful one!
True in a little have I provèd thee,
Share thou the joy and glory of thy Lord!"

But to our theme we turn. One Autumn day
When equinoctial winds began to rise

And fret and chafe the sea, and urge it on
To that perpetual siege upon the crags
In which 't was always worsted, Arthur's nurse
(He might, perhaps, have been some ten years old,)
Told him she meant to take him to the town
Next day to see his uncle. Take him where?—
His uncle?—who might that be? He had heard
Her, talking with her husband once or twice,
Mention that word, but there the matter dropt:
A brown bee passing by, a floating cloud
Across the sunshine sweeping, some poor weed
Opening a thrifty blossom, was a theme
Of far more deep import and interest,
And ever drove the subject from his thoughts.

It came before him now though as a fact,
A something tangible, though new and strange,

Pleasant perhaps, but awful certainly.
His nurse, too, did not seem as she was wont,
She talked to him much more, was very gay
Or tried to seem so and to make him so.
What for—his heart enquired what the need
Might be of this excessive joyousness
That looked like consolation in advance?

The day passed by in wond'rings, and then Night
Came weeping o'er the hills, her stars all quencht,
And sobbing like Œnone when her love
Was gone from Ida never more to roam
With her among the mountains cognizant
And full of mem'ries of the bygone bliss
Of those dear days that might not be again.

The child lay on his pallet, but aloof
Stood Sleep, close folding up her hushing wings.

Within the house was silence: — now and then
There came a feeble crack'ling from the hearth,
Where, in the ashes, smouldered the dry log,
Dark outwardly, but all aglow beneath
With sullen fire that never might be quencht.

The cricket chirp'd at intervals, the dog,
Dreaming of wand'rings on the breezy hills,
Panted and muttered barks, then waking half,
Yawned loud, winkt, stretcht himself and slept again.
Through all, the pulses of the tall old clock
Beat audibly the livelong night, its voice
Told forth the hour's slow circle. Could it be
That all those sounds well known, but yet till now
Unnoted, had a reason why they claimed

Attention and remembrance? Even so
It might be, Arthur thought, but could not tell.

Meanwhile the Night grew weary of her woe,
And wept herself to sleep, and bid the boy
Sleep too, till Morning in the whitening East
Should rise and drive her hence. The blue-veined lids
Sunk o'er the large-orbed eyes, the ruddy lips
Disparted with sweet breathings, all the form
Lay supple, and the boy-Adonis slept.

Slept; but no goddess with blush-tinted limbs,
All rosy-white and rounded, warm with hope
And throbbing through with love, a finger laid
Upon his lids, no locks of glancing gold
Played on his cheek, no tremulous warm lip
Prest his.

Across his bed a Shadow falls,
Husht, vague, dim, voiceless, and intangible,
And through the close-pent air a wav'ring wind
Sighs coldly fluctuating through the room,
And creeping o'er his limbs and to the roots
Of his loose-curling hair. He draws his breath
Deeply, and murmurs in his sleep the name
His waking lips scarce know, his Mother's name;
And at that sound the Shadow lower stoops,
Hovers and wavers o'er him silently
One fleeting moment, rises, and is gone.

"The Morn, the Morn!" proclaims the clarion shrill
And clapping wings of the triumphant cock,
Glad, confident, in answer to the faint
And timid twitterings of the little birds

That ask each other 'mid the leaf-dimmed shades
If this be moonlight or indeed the Morn.

"The Morn, the Morn!" replies the bursting light
That floods the East with radiance unrepressed
And irrepressible; its circling waves
Driving back Night to her dull fastnesses
With force she cannot, dares not to withstand.

"The Morn, the Morn!" exclaims the rosy sea,
With all the tongues of all her glitt'ring waves,
Appeased from last night's wrath by the glad sight
Of beautiful Aurora's glowing smile;
And all Creation wide takes up the cry
And echoes it through all the waking world!

Arthur woke too, with struggling consciousness
Of something strange and heavy at his heart:

He knew not what or why; but there it lay
With a cold weight, until the increasing glow
Of full-faced Morning mostly melted it.

The early meal concluded (homely bread
And rich milk from a goat all silky-haired
And snowy-white, as those the shepherd-prince
Tended on Ida, when his heart was there),
Mary her charge now summoned, telling him
The time was come to wend them to the town.
So Arthur left the shepherd's cot, the hills,
The breezy steeps, the crags, the sea whose verge
Alone divided him from the other world,
From which the ships and sea-mews came, that ne'er
Would tell the secret he so yearned to know.

The lovely lowlands! Summer's fullest prime
Was merging into Autumn when they pass'd

Through fields, though bare, yet still aglow with
gold;
Through grassy orchards, where the mellow pears
And Hesperidian apples, red and gold,
Waited the wooing of the western wind
To yield their ripened sweetness on the couch
Of richest mosses, chequered dark and bright
With dense-leaved boughs and sunbeams glancing
through;
By meadows, where in pastures rich and deep
The quiet-eyed, sleek cows lay musingly
Or grazed at ease. Past undulating knolls,
Studded with sturdy round-topt, grey-barkt oaks,
And pied with daisies and gold buttercups;
Past ferny copses, where, 'mid last year's leaves,
The pheasant's brood ran rustling, and the hare
Sat in her form, as russet as the leaves;

Through hamlets clust'ring fondly round their church,
That between age and ivy long had lost
All sharpness in its outline, and had grown
But like a larger cottage, with an arm
Pointing to Heaven, in token of its use.
Thus through the blessèd English land they past,
The shepherd's wife and the wild mountain boy.

To Arthur all this seemed a lovely dream:
Sometimes he thought that Mary must have erred
In saying Heaven lay upward, when below
All things seemed fairer than on those bare heights
That must be nearer what she said was Heaven,
And this disturbed him; but some new delight,
A tree, a flow'r, a bird that flitted by,
Brought a new thought that chased the last away.
At length they reached the town.

'Twas market-day.
The narrow streets were crowded; men and boys
Laughed, swore, talked, bargained; women, children,
girls,
Dogs, pigs, and poultry, did their best — or worst —
To swell the noise and tumult; — so it seemed
At least to Arthur, with his nerves all keen
And fresh from the eternal solitudes
Of the lone hills where God's voice only spoke.

Closely he clung to Mary, passing on
With steps that now grew weary, and with heart
Full of mistrust, that sought to hide itself,
But would not be controlled.

His uncle's house
Duly they reached, and soon were ushered in

To what he called his study, — a back-room,
Small, dark, and very cheerless. Dusty books
On farming, bad old plays, worse songs, weak tracts,
Thumbed novels of the Richardsonian school;
A mutilated Johnson, treatises
On parish-matters, paupers and manure,—
Some thirty volumes — garnisht a tall shelf,
Whose vacant planks bore smoky plaster casts
Of dogs and horses; busts of Wellington
And Peel from wretched models, noseless both;
A one-legged dancer, and quite in the rear
For decency, the very top and crown
Of plastic art, the Venus Medicis,
Which some one of the household, long ago,
Had purchased from an image boy, but which
The uncle's wife, much scandalised, had chased

From her decorous parlour, all unused
To such gross objects.

On the dingy walls
Hung coloured prints of huntsmen, in black frames.
The furniture was ugly, old, and scant,
The carpet threadbare; on the mantelpiece
Hideous delf figures, faded paper flowers
In coarsest painted beau-pots, stood to flank
An earthen Tam-o'-Shanter. In the midst
Of these rare objects sat the uncle's self.

Some men there are it takes not many words
To paint, and all those words are negatives.
He was not old nor young, handsome nor plain,
Nor stout nor slight: — a pair of eyes he had
Of no particular colour, blue or grey,

Or green, just as you fancied,— such a face
As is described in passports, such a face
As your eye passes over every day
You walk the streets, and never rests upon,
And never counts as having seen a face.

A loyal man to church and state, who thinks
The poor should be content, as he is, says,
'Tis pity people put into their heads
Such foolish notions of improvement. Trash! —
Progress and education and the rest
Of all that idle cant new-fangled folks
Won't let the world alone about. A man
Who would not hurt a fly, he says, but who
Would spurn a starving beggar from his door,
Bidding him go and work, albeit blind
Or halt or maimed; "knows he the parable?"

Of course he knows them all — all — more or less,
And thinks them good things in their way; but what
Have parables to do with parish poor?

"So," says the goodman, turning in his chair,
And laying down the County Chronicle,
"This is my nephew Arthur? Well, I hope —
— Shake hands, boy — he's a good child, Mrs. —ch?
Your name? — I quite forget it; — never mind.
He don't look very strong; your mountain air
Should give him redder cheeks; perhaps he's tired,—
But law! the youngest even of my boys.
Not nine years old, would quite make two of him!
Can he read, now, or spell? What! not a word?
My boys could read at seven, and he's ten;
I fear he's very slow. — Ah! yes, that's true,
He hasn't had advantages. Well, well,

We'll do the best we can; but still I wish
He was less backward.
"Sit you down a bit,
Sit down, boy, while I go and call your aunt."

Poor child! poor child! poor little fleeceless lamb
On which the mountain winds had softly blown
In pity and compassion; are the vales
Less kindly, that so chill and keen a breath
Should make thee shrink, and tremble, and cling close
To Mary's side?—that Mary too should sit
Silent and nervous, grasping thy small hand
And breathing hard, the while her nether lip
Contracts and twitches, and her good brown eyes
Glisten and swim beneath a humid glaze?

Soon the door opens and the aunt appears, —
A tall, slight woman, pretty once, perhaps,
But faded though still young. She calls the boy,
Looks at him, not unkindly, takes his hand,
And kisses him, half-motherly, half-cold;
Asks, is he tired? hungry? smoothes his hair,
And says it must be cut, for all those curls
Make him look like a girl; Virginia's own
Are scarce so long. She thinks he looks, perhaps,
(Appealing to her husband) not unlike
Virginia — something in the eyes; though her's
Are bluer, and her skin so much more fair.
"And now," she says, "Good nurse, you'll come and see
Your boy sometimes." Sometimes? — what can she mean?
He looks up startled, opening wide wild eyes

With terrified enquiry—was he trapt?
Torn from his hill-home, from his sea, his sky,
His lambs — from Mary — *Mary* — had *she* then
Thus played him false? was all her joyousness
Of yesterday indeed, as something seemed
To whisper, but the merry music played
Before the soldier marching to the field,
Whither he goes no more to see his home?
It was so, even so: the bitter truth
Rusht on him with a torrent of despair.
This, *this* his home, — this pent-up prison-house
In the close sweltering, noisy, hateful street
Of that most hateful town! No air, no space,
No purity, no Nature; scum and filth
And close confinement pressing down his soul
With weight no words could render! To be left
Alone, alone! not one familiar face,

Not one connecting link with that dear past
Of peace and freedom and communion close
With the great God just hid above the blue!

Strange! how so few of us, when come to years
Of ripe maturity, can e'er look back
With clear remembrance of our childish griefs!
We talk of childhood's sorrows with a smile
Half-envious, half-derisive — deem that tears
Of children are mere honey-dews, that fall
To freshen the young roses of their cheeks, —
That deeper pain than a half-felt regret
O'er a bird killed with kisses, or a toy
Broken in seeking for the magic spell
That makes it move or sound is all unknown.
Yet we've been children! surely all of us
Have known some time the stinging agony

That wounds a young child's heart when some harsh
word
Unmerited (there's no one like a child
For feeling an injustice) falls on him,
Some cruel trick is played, or some deceit
Discovered; some neglect from one he loves,
Some slight put on him lightly, and he feels
So trammelled, and so helpless to express
Or right his wrongs, so bitterly aware
That he is but a child, that no one knows
Or cares much what he suffers, though his heart
Is swelled to bursting with the consciousness
Of this great wrong for which he's no redress.
Yet Christ has said 't were better that a man
Should have a millstone hanged about his neck
And be cast down into the lower deeps,
Than that he e'er should wilfully offend

One of those little ones whose angels stand
Before the throne and see the Father's face
Through all Eternity.
But this, no doubt,
Is like the parables, well in its way,
But quite unsuited to our daily use.

So Mary smothered down the mother's heart
That rose rebellious with some memories
Of days when first the unmothered little babe
Had soothed its aching yearning for the child
Death had snatched from her. Hallowed memories
Of loving upward looks and upstretcht hands
Waking from slumber, glowing, warm and flusht
With all the life concentrated and strong.
Of baby kisses, baby laughter sweet
As rippling warble of the bengali, —

Of later days, when in her household tasks
He was so proud and pleased to lend her aid,
So gentle in his words and ways, so good,
So pure, so truthful, so unquestioning
In his obedience.
Well! she always knew
This day must come, and so it was no use
To fret that now it *was* come.
She unclaspt
The arms that clung convulsive round her neck,
Bid him be good,—she'd come and see him soon;
Wiped the poor eyes that rained a flood of brine,
By no means like the genial April showers
That childish tears are likened too, but sharp
And bitter as the tears more hardly wrung
From manhood's grief; kist him, controlled a sob,
And left him prostrate 'neath his weight of woe.

At length a hand upon his shoulder laid,
A warm and fragrant breath upon his cheek,
A murmur in his ear, made him look up
From out his folded arms and tumbled curls.

Not when the moon-loved boy Endymion,
Woke from his yearning dream and raised his eyes
To see the goddess of his vision's face
Lighten upon him, could he have beheld
Reality more exquisitely fair.

Large, liquid, violet eyes, whose heavenly tint
Had faintly dyed their orbits, swam beneath
Warm, sympathetic tears ; a humid mouth
Tremulous with emotion ; temples white
And blue-veined ; lovely cheeks a little flusht
Beyond their wont ; ringlets that seemed to give

Rather than to receive the golden light
That hung about them. Such the radiant face,
A face of seven summers, he beheld.

At once his heart and hands upstretcht themselves
To the celestial vision that came down
Half-way to meet him from its native sphere,
Smiling to see him almost smile, and mixt
Its ringlets' golden rays with his brown curls.

Gently his hand the little maiden took,
But with a half-authoritative air,
Soothing, but yet protective,—womanly,
As one who knows her power, and is resolved
To exercise it rightly for the good
And comfort of a trouble-stricken man,
Weaker than she by reason of his grief.

She bid him come with her, and she would show
Her garden, let him use her baby tools,
Dig with her spade, show him the lilac-tree
Where in the spring the blackbirds built their nest;
But that was a great secret she had kept
From both her brothers, for the boys at school
Had taught them—cruel, was it not?—to rob
Poor birds' nests; and though all the young were flown
Ever so long ago, they'd come, perhaps,
Next spring and mend the nest and lay again
Their pretty blue-green eggs. "You'll promise, though,"
She said, with earnest eye and finger raised,
"That you won't touch them;—that is very wrong,
And very very cruel."

Thus she talked,

The while his grief floating upon the stream
Of her sweet baby-eloquence flowed by
And almost disappeared. He lookt at her
And rarely spoke himself, but wond'ring gazed
With those large, thoughtful, beauty-thirsting eyes
Upon her speaking face, noted the tones
Of her clear argent voice more than the words,
And yielded up himself without a thought
Of struggle or resistance to her will,
Content to look upon her and be led.

Arthur, in years to come will you look back
To that eventful day of change and grief,
Followed by consolation from the hand
That loving leads you now,—Virginia's hand?

The spell was broken by the uncle's voice:—
"Come, children, come, it's getting over-late

And cold for you, Virginia, to be out ;
The garden's damp, we'll have you catching cold
And coughing through the winter. Well, my boy,
You've done with crying for your nurse; that's well;—
A great boy, ten year old, to weep and wail
After his nurse is quite too babyish;
But from my boys you'll soon learn manlier ways.
Come in to supper ; they'll be here anon."

The shadow of that roof-tree fell again
On Arthur's spirit as he passed the door:
Except the shepherd's cot he knew no house,
And that was small and homely, Heaven knows,
As well could be, and yet the atmosphere
Was loftier far than this. Vulgarity,
A sordidness he felt, tho' could not name,
Reigned here in everything. Virginia's face

Shone bright and pure and strangely out of place,
As Mary's in the manger.

Two big boys,
With hard red cheeks and narrow brows and eyes
Nondescript like their father's, dirty hands,
And pockets full of marbles, came from play,
Cuffing each other soundly, half for sport
And half for wanton sheer brutality:
Sheepish at first before the stranger boy,
Exchanging glances, signs, and whispered jeers
On his pale face, slight frame and clust'ring curls,
And on the evident facility
Of tyrannous ill-usage. He, the while,
Regarding them with wonder; turning thence
His eyes upon Virginia, wondering more,
And loving more, and clinging with his soul

To her, the Lady, 'mid the rabble rout
Of Comus and his herd, the one sole thing
On which his orphan heart could rest itself
And still its aching.
She, the little maid,
Sat by him, held his hand, let shine on him
Her sweet protection, glancing now and then
Secret reproval on the graceless pair
Who only laught in answer, or replied
By some dull covert jest on girlishness,
Birds of a feather, nursing dolls, and more
Such spiritual sallies, which provoked
The wits to peals of louder mirth; whereon
They bolder grew, and Dick, the elder hope
And joy of his proud father, ventured nigh,
And taking one of Arthur's rich bronze curls
Between his dirty fingers, held it up
With boisterous laughter.

Quickly it was quelled;
A sudden blow from a small nervous fist
Strengthened to strike with the internal force
That made the slight Orlando conqueror
Of the coarse bully whose sole trade was blows,
Upset the would-be tyrant on the nonce.

Silent he rose, all glowing o'er with shame,
And utterly subdued,— as much perhaps
By sheer amazement as by force or pain;
While Arthur, panting and with flashing eyes,
Though calm externally, unconscious quite
Of the importance of his victory,
And all the revolution it had wrought
In his position, sat him down again
Beside Virginia.

Wearily the day

Closed in, and sable Night her diadem
Of stars resumed; but ere our Arthur slept
His unfamiliar pillow was bedewed
With many silent tears.
At last the lids
Droopt o'er the tired eyes; dear Slumber brought
Her poppy-wreath and laid it on his brow,
Her finger on his lips, and all was peace.

BOOK I.

CANTO III.

"Yet it shall be: thou shalt lower to his level day by day,
What is fine within thee growing coarse to sympathise with clay.

"As the husband is, the wife is:—thou art mated with a clown,
And the grossness of his nature will have weight to drag thee down."

TENNYSON.

BOOK I.

CANTO III.

"MOST women have no characters at all,"—
So says a man who knew, perhaps, as much
As men in general of womankind,
And, as a Poet, more than common men,
By the keen intuition Poets have,
Which, joined to observation, often holds
Sufficiently Experience's place,
Nor oft misleads them.
"Pity 'tis, 'tis true."
Women are weak, and chiefly weak in this,
That few have any real characters
Truly their own, innate and vigorous

With individual life, firm, constant, strong,
Able to breast life's current, keep foot-hold
'Mid pebbles, hidden rocks and shifting sands
Of faulty education, circumstance,
Bad precept, worse example, oft'ner still
That vice born of a virtue, the blind love
And reckless idol-worship, which will make
So many women, born for better things,
Lose soul and body, know not right from wrong,
Cast honour, dignity and womanhood,
Home, friends, peace, fame, convictions, earth and
Heaven —
Well knowing what the risk and what the gain —
Before some utter Moloch of a man,
Who takes the off'ring idly, as a thing
Of little worth, and even spurns, perhaps,
The worshipper from clinging round his knees.

It may be that such women's hearts are warm,
But small and narrow they are certainly;
And something there is wanting in the brain, —
Moral perception, and the consciousness
Of value and responsibility.
One quality or beauty in excess,
Without a counterbalance, will become
Moral or physical deformity.

Many there are who have not even this,
This virtue over-grown, like wilding boughs
Of vine, that in unpruned luxuriance
Get worthless and unfruitful. Natures weak,
And pale and colourless as wax, that take
Every impression quick and easily,
To be effaced as quickly. Born, perhaps,
With just a little heart, a little brain,

An inkling of refinement and romance;
Some beauty in pink cheeks and shining curls,
And lips that smile without well knowing why,
And eyes with tears as ready as the smiles.

Take any number of these girls, alike
By nature, sisters, we'll suppose, all born
Of the same parents; showing at the first
As little difference of character
As can exist where no two souls or forms
In nature, living or inanimate,
Were ever quite the same.
Train one of these
With tenderness, refinement; closely watch
Her tendencies and aptitudes; take note
How this may be developt, that represt;
Strengthen her weakness, make her wings expand

And gently lead her upwards, not too fast
Nor high, lest she should fail before she reach
The goal, and feel her feebleness, like one
Learning to swim, who suddenly is seized
With panic that at once unnerves his limbs,
Makes his brain giddy, drags him struggling down
To the deep bottom, terrified and spent,
With courage gone for ever. You may make
With such continual training, not a great
High character, but something fair and sweet,
And very fit to grace an honest hearth;
To share a good man's heart and confidence,
And, like a violet worn upon his breast,
With simple sweetness ever solace him.

Select another for apprenticeship
To the world's service; teach her tacitly—

She'll seize your meaning quick enough, be sure —
The science of appearances; to skim
Upon the surfaces of Life, of Art,
Of Knowledge, of Religion: never heed
What she is fitted for. She has no ear,
No taste for music? — That's unfortunate,
For music she must learn;—days, weeks, months, years,
Of tears, and labour, and discouragement
Must go to the performance of quadrilles,
And "brilliant pieces," jingle, crash and froth,
Most vilely executed as a task
By trembling, blundering fingers, to a group
Of tortured listeners. She has no eye
For form or colour? — She must learn to draw;
To reproduce, with labour infinite,
Some lithograph, conventional and false. —
She must read too, — to say that she *has* read;

Must go to church, because 'tis right to give
Two hours in seven days to certain forms,
However tedious, to keep well with God,
And set a good example to the poor.
Adornment, dress are easier; indeed,
These almost come by nature, — like small-talk:
Some training at the outset is required
To make distinctions between elder sons
And younger; but this too is learnt in time.
  And so the little heart and little brain,
Unexercised, dry up; the empty form
Still moves and speaks in ball-rooms, very like
A woman, but at home the soulless thing
Subsides again to dollhood without springs.

  And so on with the rest. Of one you make
A mawkish sentimentalist; a fourth

Becomes a harsh sectarian, morose
Unbending and intolerant; a fifth
A feeble hoyden, making herself sick
With smoking; trying to talk slang and hide
Her deadly terror of a wainscot mouse.
  A sixth, no worse by nature than the rest,
Falls into evil hands; becomes the tool,
Of some designing woman, or the toy
Of some base man. Lower and lower still
She falls, she has not heart enough to cling
Where first she fell and go no deeper down,
But drops from sin to vice; grows cynical
And utterly corrupted; casts aside
Distinctions between right and wrong, admits
The existence but of matter; worships gain,
Becomes divested of the instinctive love
That reigns amid the very animals,

More brutalised than brutes, and lives and dies
A monstrous blot and stain to womanhood.

Another of this type is subjected
To other influences, — commonplace
Of no markt character. Her lot is cast
Mid natures like her own, even perhaps
A little lower. She is ever taught,
By precept and example, that the end
For which the woman came into the world
Is just to tend her household and to bear,
And rear up children through the measles, croup,
And whooping-cough; to keep them clean and neat,
And not more troublesome than can be helpt.

And so the single talent she possest
Is wrapt up in a napkin. Intellect

Is very good for people who write books, —
Though books themselves are highly dangerous things,
And mostly well avoided; at the best
Useless, with few exceptions. Art and taste
Are rather worse than books: distract the mind —
Often corrupt it, — see the shocking works
Of painters and of sculptors!

Has she heart?

A little. Well, the man who marries her
And takes her for his housekeeper and nurse,
The children that she bears him, are enough
To occupy it solely: surely wives
And mothers of young families need ne'er
Look out for other objects for their love?
To do so is a sort of robbery.
And so the love turns narrow, jealous, grows
Merely another name for selfishness.

To this last stamp belonged our Arthur's
aunt.
His mother was her sister; albeit, she
Was cast by nature in a higher mould,
And, taken early by her godmother
From the material atmosphere of home,
Was not soul-crampt like her.
Early she wed
A sculptor, like herself, young, handsome, poor, —
A moral leper in her parent's eyes;
And not content — the hapless pair! — to offend
By living thus together, they must die
Together, leaving their unwelcome child
A burden on the family.
At last,
This aunt, a little kinder than the rest,
And often minded by Virginia's eyes

Of her dead sister's; prickt at times by thoughts
Of her own girlhood, smothered memories
Of something almost like a sympathy
With her dead sister's folly — quelled, of course,
By after wisdom and experience —
Prevailed upon her husband to consent
To house the boy, and see what might be done
To put him in the way to earn his bread.

When women are not utterly corrupt
And hardened utterly, you may be sure
There is a quiet corner in their hearts
Where — unsuspected oft — there lies perdue
A shadow of Romance, a little well
Of the holy water of that charity
That lies in love more than in almsgiving, —
Things sometimes missing in some better men.

So she was kind to Arthur, in her way;
Not fond, not tender: all of tenderness
That her heart harboured was concentrated
Upon one darling head, whose every curl
Was twisted with her heart-strings. All her soul
Worshipt Virginia. Heaven lay in her eyes,
Earth only where she trod. You spoke of Love
Before her, — Love as passion; largely dwelt
Upon its powers, its transports, all its strength,
Its miracles, its soul-compelling force,
Its strange transfigurating influence;
She listened coldly, and half-scandalised,
Half-pitying such folly. Love for her
Meant only mother's love, and mother's love
Just meant love of Virginia. Speak of her,
Of her sweet ways, her lovely eyes, her curls,
Her little feet and hands—such hands! her skin

Like milk, with new-blown roses underneath
The surface, where the cheeks were; how her eyes
Would palely lighten, all her faded face
Gleam up with hints of beauty pass'd away,
And soul that might have been there, long ago,
But had been strangled at the birth with saws
Of grovelling world-wisdom, hugging it
To death down in the bear pit where it fell.
'Twas well for Arthur that his aunt had seen
That reflect of Virginia's in his eyes,
That shadow of Virginia's face on his.
Not all the highest gifts of mind and soul,
Not all perfections, moral, physical,
Acquired, or in-born, could e'er have waked
In her that touch of genuine sympathy,
Faint though it was, as all in her was faint,
Except that one sole sentiment, the love

That, greedy, could not be content with less
Than all her heart.
At times she'd look at him
With a half-smile, stroke down his hair, as when
The likeness first had struck her ; sometimes even
—(But these were rare occasions, and by him
Greeted with wondering pleasure)—a faint kiss,
Beside the official night and morning ones,
She gave him: rather as a weakness though,
Which needed some apology, for straight
She would remember little deeds or words
Deserving commendation, though perhaps
When done or spoken, passing unobserved.

And so the time passed on.—He went to school,
The day-school of the little town ;—but first
His babe Egeria, playing still her part,

Taught him with loving pride her little store
Of knowledge. When the spring-time came again,
And the bronze trees began to fledge with green,
And violets to play at hide and seek
Among their leaves, and faint sweet primroses
To star the moss-banks, and the lilac bush
(Deserted by the faithless blackbirds—spite
Of all Virginia's care)—to bring to birth
Her lovely children, fathered by the Spring: —
Then in a bower, that man had done his worst
To make most vulgar, but that nature kind
Had so enmantled o'er with bells and cups
And leaves of flowers, that it seemed all her own
Sole handiwork,—the little pair would sit,
Brown curls and golden mingling, o'er a book,
Her tracing finger followed by his eye,
His voice re-echoing the syllables

That hers repeated.—When the task was done
She praised him with that same maternal love
That roused his dying heart the day that first
It reached him. Then hand closely claspt in hand
They roved the garden, pausing here and there
Over some great discovery—a bud
Of a new flower, an insect with bright wings,
Venturing such wild conjectures of its state
And name and nature. But the great delight
Lay in the compass of a foot of slate.
Upon the stony surface, meant for sums,
The boy, with strangely skilful hand, would trace
Phantasmagoria running through his brain,
Or shapes from living Nature. All he thought
Or dreamt or read or saw, was given form,
Embodied in bold outline full of grace
And vigour and bright fancy. By the hour

He sat with knitted brow, and lips comprest,
Striving to make the untrained hand pursue
The lines his brain conceived, or eye beheld;
Then breaking off with quick impatient sigh,
Unsatisfied and vext, he blotted out
The imperfect execution of his thought,
And set to work again with earnest care
To better it.

Meanwhile with curious eye
Virginia watcht the work. It seemed to her
A sort of magic, when she saw the scenes
And characters of her pet stories grow
Before her eyes, take shape, reality;
And thenceforth in her memory they wore
The semblance Arthur gave them. Were it well
For her, if memory had rested there?

BOOK II.

CANTO I.

"I envy not in any moods
The captive void of noble rage,
The linnet born within the cage,
That never knew the summer woods."

TENNYSON.

BOOK II.

CANTO I.

A SMILING mother on a morn in June
Walks forth among the roses with her babe;
And in her arms, all flusht and glowing warm,
With grave and sleepy eyes and pouting mouth,
The newly-wakened creature silent sits,
The while the mother's cheery voice rings clear
Among the dewy alleys and pearl'd lawns,
That echo to sweet foolish words and songs,
Poured forth for very wantonness of joy
And overflow of proud maternity.

Anon the genial and inspiring air,
The breath of Summer, heaving o'er the flowers
Stirs the babe's pulses to a fuller life ;
He smiles in answer to his mother's smile,
Clasps her warm neck, plays with her wind-wooed hair,
And claps his tiny hands and shouts for glee.
She plucks a rose, charged with translucent pearls,
And sets the infant on its tottering feet,
Then stands before him, holding out the rose
A foot beyond his grasp.

Around him hang,
Wooing his touch, a thousand buds as fair,
A thousand buds as fragrant, but his eye
Sees only the unreachable, his thought
Yearns for it solely: to possess, enjoy
The other blooms, he need but raise his hand

And grasp them ; to obtain that single one
He needs must conquer distance, weakness, fear;
And when with toil and trembling infinite
His swaying steps have brought him to the goal
The treacherous rose recedes, and all in vain
He strains to seize it ; still the wary bloom
Eludes his clutching hand, coyly withdraws,
And still his eager eye and timid steps
(That as desire enlarges lose the sense
Of danger) chase the tempting fugitive,
And still his mother smiles and draws him on.

What is the moral ? That bright restless youth,
(Whose blood is all astir and circling so
It will not let the eye or hand or brain
Rest in contentment with the present joy)
Because it urges onward to obtain

In the far future some uncertain bliss,
Some Cynthia that can but be ours in dreams,
And for To-morrow ever spurns To-day,
Is therefore wrong and foolish utterly?
Not so. Evils there may be, doubtless are,
In this strong craving for the unreachable,
But Nature has ordained this with an end
Perfectly wise and just. Say, were it well
That the hot youth she meant to make a Poet
Should sit down by the hearth and thank the stars
That they had given porridge to his needs,
The which sufficed him, — till his limbs grew stiff,
His brain most stolid? Wiser, kinder far,
While the youth's limbs are supple, the youth's brain
Strong in its fancies, eager in its aims,
But yet not settled in its purposes,
She holds aloft a diadem, a star,

And bids him follow till his aimless eye
And feeble steps gain fixedness and strength ;
And so at last he learns to tread the path
Here, on this earth, that leads from height to height
To Heaven's golden gate, where crown and star
No more elude the Pilgrim's outstretcht hand.

And so, as years went by and Arthur grew
Into a stripling, did the growing soul
Begin to feel its wings and long to test
Their untried powers of flight. He felt so strong
Within himself, so full of latent force,
Yet so tied down by force of circumstance!
A gladiator chained, with all his strength
Of muscle unimpaired, but thralled and bound
By bonds of ignorance, youth, penury,
Dependence, on the one side; — prejudice

Upon the other, joined to sordidness
And most ignoble aims; and day by day
He sickened at the contrast of what was
With what his longing soul pictured might be,
Were he but free, even as other youths
To whom the world in some sort open lies, —
The world that seemed but closed to him alone!

His was an Artist's and a Poet's soul.
Such souls will fret and chafe, whate'er betide,
And each, like wild-bird tethered to a stake,
Fly upward to the limit of the string,
Be it long or short; and though each time it springs
The galling cord sore wounds it and forbids
Further ascent; it tries and tries again,
And will not be content to rest below;

To lose the far blue woods, the purple hills,
The noble elms, that like tall sentinels
Rise from the hedgerows, (which in May and June
Need guarding for their wealth of hawthorn-bloom
And pale sweet dog-rose wreaths) — and to accept
In lieu sufficiency of daily fare.

In vague wild passionate words he often spoke
Something of what he longed and felt and dreamed
To one whose heart responded to each word,
To one who listened with uplifted eyes
And heaving breast, torn with contending thoughts.
The time was altered since Virginia's hand —
Virginia's voice — could soothe his wayward moods,
Charm all his sorrows, lead his wandering steps,
And still the utmost tumults of his mind.

In certain points their natures were alike;
Highly poetic, perfectly refined,
Lofty in aim and act, simple in heart,
Impressionable, ardent, loving, true,
And most unworldly both. Such qualities
The two possest in common: — thence diverged
The points in which they differed. Arthur bore
The palm in intellect: Virginia's mind
Could scarce be said to reach the giddy height
Upon whose top the flame of genius gleams;
The flame that, used, can purify from dross
Like 'finer's furnace, but abused consumes
Like scarlet conflagration, or burns blue,
Making men look like demons in its light.

She felt this difference, and her spirit bowed
As Sarah's, calling Abraham her lord —

In fond and ready homage to the King
Whose starry crown of genius shone alone
For her in that dull household, glad and proud
That any of its rays should fall on her.
But, though she guess'd it not, she also held
Advantage over Arthur: — Morally
Her nature was a stronger one than his;
More buoyant, more enduring, evener poised,
Less shifting, guided more by principle
And less by impulse. Once her duty clear,
She trod the path appointed steadily,
Nor turned to right nor left, albeit the way
Was often strewed with stones or clogged with mud
Those little feet seem all unfit to tread.

And thus their love had changed its character
As each developt. The pure lambent flame

That played about Virginia's golden head
Shone with a paler radiance than the crown
That blazed on Arthur's brow, as virgin pearls
Veil their mild lustre near the diamond's ray.
  The place she held too, and her womanhood
Formed other reasons why her course and fate
And character should differ thus from his.

  She had a home, no genial home, in truth,
For such as she, but yet her own, and fraught
With all the associations of her life ;
A mother who adored her, brothers, sire
Who held a part even more liberal
Than was their due in her warm bounteous heart ;
A simple course of duties to perform,
Homely, but still embellisht by the grace
That hung around her every word and act

Like ivy on a barren grey stone wall: —
A fate assured, — as far as human fate
Can be assured, — and just, perhaps, as much
Immixture of the mother's colder blood
As served to calm, but never chill the heart.

With Arthur all was sadly otherwise:
No home to call his own, no kindred links,
Except Virginia's, of more warmth or weight
Than those that bind dependants to the hand
That in dispensing clothes and daily bread
Deems it performs as much — or rather more —
Than duty or humanity commands.
No fond associations in the past
Had he, no guidance in the present; none
To say "God speed thee!" in the uncertain path

To the dim future, no fixt rule of right
To lead his wand'ring footsteps in a world
He needs must fight his way through:—yet he longed
To arm him for the battle and set forth
To do or die, as might become a man.

Most men, I note, are selfish where their aims
And their affections cross; the latter still
Give way before the former:—so 'tis best
Perhaps, it should be, else were daring deeds
Of rare occurrence in this nether world.
And so when Arthur, with a flashing eye
And earnest accent spoke his dreams and hopes
And passionate aspirings to go forth
To try his fortune, his excited gaze
Forgot to note whether Virginia's cheek
Would pale, or eyelid quiver, or her hand

Press closer on his arm; he only saw
She listened steadfastly, he only heard
The words she forced to echo in a voice
Forbid to tremble, to his passionate words—
She loved so self-forgettingly, she deemed
Him so above her, that she still reproacht
As selfish weakness the intense regret
That stung her gentle soul whene'er she thought
Of what would be her life, its light removed.

Something she caught, too, of the ambitious fire
That urged him on to win at least a name
And take a place a free-born earnest soul
Might justly lay full claim to. Well she knew
This was no place, no life for such as he,
And still that consciousness forbade the wish
To chain him to her side.—And so no tear,

No accent of complaint, no fond reproach
Came ever to remind him the desire
He cherisht, if fulfilled, might bring to her,
His friend, his only friend, his dearly loved —
(For dearly loved she was, and in his dreams
Her place was still beside him)—any pang,—
Must leave her lonely in the ungenial home
Till all his schemes had prospered, and he came
Proudly to claim her. So he had decreed
As youth's strong self-security decrees.

Wild were his dreams, but yet not aimless all,
Nor destitute of method nor of form.
The plant of genius, whose strong root is hid
Within us, works its way through stubborn soil,
Through choking weeds of ignorance, 'gainst winds
The bitterest and most adverse :—all the tricks

Of circumstance and prejudice are vain
To kill it.

Late at morning's prime I roved
Where erst a garden bloomed, where now a waste
Of tangled vegetation, rank and wild
Held sole pre-eminence ;—or so I deemed,—
Till turning from an alley long untrod
And densely sheltered by o'er-arching boughs
From whence, scarce half a foot above my head,
The shrieking blackbirds darted from the nests
My presence had invaded,—I arrived
Upon a little space hedged closely round
With dark-leaved evergreens, but at the top
The blue sky spread its canopy unbarred
By crossing boughs, and in his daily course
From east to west, the genial sun would still
Grant it a smile in passing. 'Mid the shrubs

A strong white forest-rose had taken root—
(Perchance been planted by a hand mine knew,
Now mouldering—O my heart, thou knowest where !)
And all the stem and lower boughs concealed
Amid the thicker evergreens, its top
Had struggled upwards towards the Heaven above
'Gainst obstacles incredible, till now
Far o'er my head, among dark polisht leaves
Of laurel and stiff holly, it outspread
Its clusters exquisite of bud and bloom ;
Some yet green-sheathed, some tinted at the heart
With faintest yellow, others shedding down
Their petals white, that lay like pearly shells
Receding waves have left on lonely shores.

And thus it was with Arthur :—towards the light
His genius struggled with a resolute aim.

The beauty-loving eye, the hand untaught
But yet so strangely skilful to define
All forms in Nature,—gifts like these, we know,
Are not bestowed in vain, but indicate
The course to tread; "the talent makes the call."

So from the time when first the vapours vague
Of childish dreams began to be condensed
To something more like thoughts, the boy resolved
That he would be a Sculptor. Looking back
Upon the oblivious shade that hung around
Two sadly-solemn, half-mysterious names—
Father and Mother—he beheld a point
Of union and of sympathy, a link
That markt him son of that departed sire;
A heritage, a birthright, seemed the power
He felt lay in him. So much in the Past

Prest his steps onward in the loved pursuit.
The Present that we all hold by the hand,
The Present that we all in some degree
May guide and order, raised aloft her voice,
"Behold me! make me thine, let nought avail
"To turn thee from thy course while I am here.
"Seize me—I serve thee; let me pass away,
"I join the irrevocable Past and 'scape
"For ever and for ever thy control.
"Be wise, be warned before I say farewell!"
The mystic Future, smiling through a haze
All rose and golden held aloft a crown
Of olive twined with laurel; "This," she said,
"For him who wins to wear!" and Arthur vowed
To strive to win and wear the verdant crown.

BOOK II.

CANTO II.

"The slow sweet hours that bring us all things good,
The slow sad hours that bring us all things ill,
And all good things from evil, brought the night
In which we sat together and alone,
And to the want that hollowed all the heart,
Gave utterance by the yearning of an eye
That burn'd upon its object thro' such tears
As flow but once a life.
The trance gave way
To those caresses, when a hundred times
In that last kiss, which never was the last,
Farewell, like endless welcome, liv'd and died.
Then followed counsel, comfort, and the words
That make a man feel strong in speaking truth;
Till now the dark was worn, and overhead
The lights of sunset and of sunrise mix'd
In that brief night; the summer night, that paused
Among her stars to hear us; stars that hung
Love-charmed to listen:—all the wheels of Time
Spun round in station, but the end had come.

O then like those who clench their nerves to rush
Upon their dissolution, we two rose,
There—closing like an individual life—
In one blind cry of passion and of pain,
Like bitter accusation, ev'n to death,
Caught up the whole of love and utter'd it,
And bade adieu for ever."

TENNYSON.

BOOK II.

CANTO II.

THE thing that hath been, saith the sage of old,
Is just the thing that shall be; what is done
Over and over shall be done again,
And in the presence of the all-seeing Sun
From age to age there still is nothing new.

It may be so: — the venerable World
Is old enough to have seen the chequered wheel
Of Circumstance revolve till all its hues
Are to his eyes familiar: — but for us,
Short-lived ephemera, whose little span
Gives us but time to note a few degrees

In the vast circuit, our experience —
Our individual experience —
Is widely different: — every stage of life
Is fraught with novelty. — That which *I* feel,
I think, *I* do, *I* suffer, differs still —
Or so I deem, — at least in some degree,
From that which any other man has felt
Or thought or done or suffered.—This caprice
Of Fate or Fortune that befalls me now
Is strange and new to me; what boots it then
To me, to you, to any man alive,
That just this hap a thousand years ago
Befell some son of Adam, o'er whose grave
We tread unweeting that he lived or died?

For this, shall I, whose pulses throb, perchance,
With hope, fear, passion, love more deep and strong

Than Life or Death ; with expectation, — sick
And breathless with its own intensity,
Say " Still ye ; that which trebles now your speed
And makes ye beat thus wildly, some dead man
In the obliterate Past has undergone ;
And in that Future ye shall never see
Some man unborn shall undergo the same ? "

No ; each must buy his own experience
And use it for himself ; 'tis no heir-loom,
Else were we all born old, and Life a thing
Most flat and stale, wanting the bitter-sweet
That tickles all our palates in the Unknown.

So Arthur deemed his fate unlike the fate
Of any other youth ; he saw no issue,
No breach, no opening in the stern dead wall

O'er which his straining eager sight beheld
The far horizon stretching, but which kept
His steps in loathëd durance.—Well he knew
One hint, one whisper of his wild desire
To those who clothed and fed him were as though
The horse they stabled craved to be set free
To roam at will the prairies of the West.
An Artist! why therein precisely lay
His father's prime offence! A vagabond,
One against whom the doors of honest men
Who'd growing sons or daughters, should be shut,
Lest Idleness and Immorality
And Poverty, the comrades of his state,
Should enter with him and infect the house.

But a man's soul's a thing that swells and grows
And bursts the withes that bind it; though at times

Delilah finds the spell to tie it down,
Fetter its limbs and put out both its eyes,
And make it sport for all the Philistines.

And so, when Arthur found Occasion hung
Still in the rear, meanwhile the shining days
Were passing, one by one, to that forlorn
And ghost-trod shore, from whose waste silent strand
No traveller returns to complete the task
His hand left here unfinisht, he resolved
To seize her by the hand and draw her on, —
No matter how reluctant she might prove, —
And force her to attend his mastering will.

To wish is easy. — There's a gentle slope
We all ascend a thousand times : — some men

More women, are content to linger there,
Lying upon the sward and looking up
With longing eyes and thirsting lips to where
A hundred feet above there hang in view
On goodly branches flowers whose faintest hues
Are brighter than the rainbow's, and whose scents
Intoxicate with fulness of delight;
Fruitage whose luscious mellowness might shame
The golden-rinded apple Ate flung
To stir to jealousy the mighty Three
Who scorned not to appear on Gargarus,
Hoping to win by bounteous promises
Such meed from Priam's son.

The second stage
Is steeper far. — The nerve and will that climb
The cliff where stands the Castle of Resolve
Must needs be stronger tempered: — yet e'en here

'Tis worse than vain to linger : — if but half
The journey be accomplisht, 'twere as well
To have spared our pains:—the most that we may
do
(And this not always) is to pause awhile
To gather breath, and scan the height that still
Towers between us and the mighty goal
That stands as high as Ilion's song-built towers
To catch the flushing glory of the morn,
The fortress of Performance. —
He indeed
Who scales the rock, surmounts the battlements,
And quells the Dragon grinning at the gate,
May rest his limbs and deck his burning brows
With coronals of cool, balm-breathing flowers,
May quench his fevered thirst with nectar-blood
Of those resplendent fruits.

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Nor suffering nor penitence would ope
The hearts and doors now closed on him for aye.

Free! he was free! the prison gates stood wide,
The wide world lay beyond, the summer sun
Shone on a man who owned no master now
But the one LORD and MASTER, whom to serve
Is purest and most perfect liberty.

How does he hail his freedom? with proud joy,
And mien exultant? When the champion high
Of Gloriane from proud Orgoglio's den
Delivered Una's love, "th' unwonted sunne,"
Falling with blaze unshaded on the eyes
Long used to prison-gloom, brought nought at first
But pain and shrinking; so now Freedom's light
Dazzled young Arthur's eyes. And more than this—

Oh more, ten thousand times! the thought that now
Was come the hour when he must say farewell
To that fair virgin star whose sweet pure light
Had shone with mild effulgence on the path
That else for eight long years had been all dark,
Unmanned him.—With flusht cheek and burning brow
He sought the little chamber in the roof
Where many a winter night the biting frost
And many a summer night the sullen heat
Had kept him waking, yet whose narrow walls,
Traced with the images his busy brain
Could never cease conceiving, had a spell —
How strong he felt it now!—a silent claim
Urged with mute earnestness on his regard.

Upon the lowly bed he sat him down, —
The tumult in his heart was sinking fast

And his heart sinking with it. "All alone,"
A voice within it whispered, "All alone,"
Refusing to be stilled. —
The summer eve
Stole silently into the little room: —
Athwart the ivied lattice first she brought
The glow and glory of the dying sun,
That, dolphin-like, displayed his brightest hues
Ere owning the pre-eminence of Death.
Then grey-veiled twilight, then the silver ray
Of lovely Hesperus to comfort him.
But finding that his sorrow rather grew
Than weakened, last she brought the lady moon
With whispers that a new Endymion wept
All for her presence; but when Cynthia found
Not all her smiles could clear his heavy brow
Angry, she hid her unregarded charms
Behind a floating cloud and left him darkling.

And now upon his ear there breaks a sound,
A sound how longed for! On the creaking stair
There comes a stealthy step; nearer it draws —
A timid knock—a whisper at the door —
And his true Cynthia trembles in his arms.

O Flower of Love, upon thy green young buds
In vain the March sun glares; 'tis not the beam
That swells them for the blooming; 'tis the rains
Of weeping April make the blossom burst
To full outspread expansion.

Side by side
Claspt in a strict embrace the boy and girl
Sat trancèd in the present of their woe.—
That brief sad present now is all they own,
And all the wealth of love that the lost past
Has been collecting must be heapt therein.

O store too rich for such a narrow space,
Treasure enough to freight an argosy

Stowed in a fisher's bark! so close 'tis piled
No room remains for vows, words, thoughts, hopes,
plans,
Their very breath seems choked, as heart to heart
And lip to lip they firmly cling, nor dare
Yet to dissever, lest a single second
Should thus escape them.—At the last came down
The thunder-rain of tears, and all the view
Was drencht and blurred and blotted into one
Vast formless space of woe.
And while they wept
The white moon smiled and nightingales sang clear.

Once more the rosy pearl-deckt morn awakes,
And through the dewy garden wander slow
Those two sad lovers, while behind them fall
Long darkling shadows twain, as though their grief
Took form to follow them.—

The hour was come
When parting might no longer be delayed,
And every throbbing second was so charged
With such an agony of love and woe
There seemed to crowd more life into its space
Than dwells in the compass of a common day.
One more embrace, one more long breathless kiss
Blending two souls in one, and they are parted.

Again a journey through the summer land:
The morn is in her early prime; not yet
Is her first virgin freshness ripening
Towards the fervid passion of the noon:—
Her feet are gemmed with dew, her lips are cool,
And cool her breath upon the wakening flowers,
And cool her kisses on the fevered brow
And tear-stained cheek of the yet weeping boy.
Slowly he wends along the dry white road,

Winding 'twixt matted hedges dimmed with dust,
Yet starred with bramble-blooms and blushing bells
Of almond-scented bindweed, fluttered o'er
By aimless butterflies.—High in mid-air
The larks are worshipping ; from cottage roofs
Up-waver softest plumes of pale blue smoke,
And half-drest children, flusht from recent sleep
Hang at new-opened doors, and mother-birds
Hop through the dew-drencht meads in eager quest
Of unsuspicious worms to feed their young.
  And so by slow degrees the poet's soul,
The Memnon-voice in Arthur's breast awoke
To yield its homage to the blessèd morn,
And all his new-found manhood rising up
And standing on its feet, dons its best arms,
And forth he goes to fight with Destiny.

BOOK II.

CANTO III.

"He passed; a soul of nobler tone:
  Her spirit loved and loves him yet,
  Like some poor girl whose heart is set
On one whose rank exceeds her own.

"He mixing with his proper sphere,
  She finds the baseness of her lot
  Half-jealous of she knows not what
And envying all that meet him there.

"The little village looks forlorn;
  She sighs amid her narrow days
  Moving about the household ways
In that dark house where she was born."

TENNYSON.

" . . . do you feel to-night
  The urgency and yearning of my soul?"

E. BARRETT BROWNING.

BOOK II.

CANTO III.

And he is gone with eager heart and arm
To be, to do, to win him name and fame —
Or so at least he deems, which at the start
Will serve as well as the reality
To give him heart and strength : — and come what
may
Freedom complete is gained, and change of scene,
And scope to exercise and to improve
The gift he feels he owns. —
Not so with her ;
Lone dove unmated, her ungenial part

Is but to suffer.— Suffer with calm brow ;
Nor may she ease her heart with talk of him,
Speaking his name to sympathising ears
Until the void of absence be half-filled
With the familiar shadow summoned back
By potent spells of Memory and Love.
  His very name is driven from the door
As though it were a word that brought disgrace;
The haunts that loved him dare not echo it,
But when she seeks some shadow of him there,
Whispers a spirit with finger on the lip
" Question us not.—The past is past and gone."—
And sad as midnight rain on her lone ear
Falls the unhappy echo, " past and gone ! "

  And so she led two lives.—The livelong day
She went about her tasks with diligence,

Not listlessly — nor spiritless, like one
Whose thoughts are anywhere but where she is.
Her household duties were performed with care,
Her needle plied its best; she had sweet looks
And kindly words and smiles for all the house,
Interest and care and ready sympathy
And active aid when needed.

Then came Night,
That brings rest to the happy whose bright lives
Run in the sun like children, till o'ercome
With over-exercise they fall asleep
And never wake till morning.—Night that brings
Unrest and feverish longing and wild stir
And tumult and a sense of passionate pain
The greater that 'tis undefined and vague
To those who love with suffering, as most love
Who love in earnest.

When the darkling hush
Stole down deep on the landscape, and the trees
Without her window breathed mysterious sighs
Or shivered in the air that seemed so still;
When the white moonlight crept along the wall
And the stars twinkled in their silent watch,
And vague perfumes and sounds and whispers dim
Floated and wavered to and fro and died;
Then did that other inward life awake.

Awake with a wild hunger, craving so
For just a sight of well-remembered eyes,
For just a sound of a remembered voice,
For just a touch of a remembered hand,
For just a pressure of remembered lips,
Until the longing grew to agony,

The void to torture that appeared too strong
And bitter to be borne, so unappeased
And desperate in its great intensity.
She thought, "While I am here, eating my heart
For want of other aliment, perchance
He sits alone and sad, needing the care
I die to give him.— Maybe he is now
With those whose hearts are full of other loves,
And therefore hear no music in his voice,
Behold no magic in his smile, to whom
The pressure of his hand could bring no thrill
Of tremulous transport.—O this life, this life!
This doom of separation that it brings
To those whose mutual need is so extreme!
This doom of cold companionship with those
Whose daily lives run parallel with ours
But never blend two currents into one."

In all this the great pang, the pang the worst
Was spared her — jealousy. It may seem strange,
But she was so divinely innocent,
So utterly unweeting of the ways
Of this most wicked world, its tempting sins,
Its facile so-called loves, that no stray doubt
Of Arthur's heart crost hers.
At times she felt
His love was not the same, perhaps, as hers,
Not quite so fervent : — well, she did not care,
Her own was so alive, so strong, instinct
With such a soul and force, it almost seemed
Sufficient to its own support. In her
Love was as life : — it gave its taste and hue
To everything. By day it ever walkt
Beside her in her tasks ; at night it stood
Above her pillow. More — yet more than all

It lived and breathed in prayer. Down on her knees
She bent before the Almighty, holding up
Her love that He might bless it, strengthen it,
Make it more noble, holier, keep and save
And perfect it. And then she rose relieved
And hopeful, and prepared to meet the day
She knew would bring its wonted weight of cares
And duties that of old seemed light enough,
But now monotonous as daily bread
To palates that have known ambrosia's taste.

At times, when household tasks are fairly done,
And eve begins to draw a freer breath,
And rise unburdened from the oppressive heat
That hangs the summer day upon the house,
Up to the narrow chamber in the roof
With quiet step Virginia steals alone.

Within the close-pent walls the stirless air
Hangs hot and heavy ; on the window pane
The blue-fly bangs and buzzes, and above
With greedy patient eye the spider sits
Within her net that quivers as his wings
Unweeting strike its outward filaments,
And send a thrill into her hungry heart.
Up in the outside angle 'neath the eaves
A swallow's nest is percht, and gaping throats
Yawn wide each time her twittering circling flight
Brings the white-breasted mother near her brood.
But these are not the things Virginia sees.

She sees the figures on the white-washt wall
An absent hand has traced. Here rides the Cid
On prancing Babieca to and fro
Before the castle where Chimene sits—

She whom his hand has orphaned by the blade
Of bloodthirsty Tizona, or the edge
Of double-tongued Collada, whose device
Is "Si, si!" on the one side, and "No, no!"
On the reverse. From out the loop-hole looks
A pallid, longing, angry, earnest face
That loves and hates and thirsts to be revenged
Nor less to be beloved, nor aught desires
Between his life-blood or his bloody hand.

Here stands Samaria's daughter by the well,
While He, the Well of Everlasting Life,
Sits travel-stained beside the dry highway,
And with clear eyes and lips divinely calm,
Reads her soul's inmost secrets and reproves
Gently, and teaches her bedarkened soul
Whither to turn her eyes and heart in prayer.

There the Maid-mother watches by her Son,
With face so like, so like the gazer's own !
And here a white-winged angel wears again
The self-same semblance; and she looks and weeps
Until the deepening twilight spreads her veil
Between the images and her sad gaze.

Then in the darkening room with folded hands
And closèd eyes she sits and thinks and thinks
With all the power of her heart and brain
Concentred on the memory of her love.
And then she strives to send her spirit forth
To follow him upon his pilgrimage,
And further yet, to guess how years and change
May act upon her darling's thoughts and fate
And work upon their future destiny.

At times an anguish seizes her:—she finds
Not always will the features she so loves

Present themselves distinctly to her mind :
Far off they seem and vague, as faces seen
In ill-remembered dreams :—O must she lose
All that remains of him ? can memory be
So faithless while the heart is faithful still ?
And while she mourns bereaved, back, home again
It comes as she had noted it some day
Under some certain aspect, glad or proud
Or grieved or earnest; and now for a time
'Tis all her own again, imbued with life
To dwell on and to yearn for, till it seems
As if the fervour of desire were such
That it must bring his spirit nearer hers,
The flesh alone divided.

Then she wakes,
Opens her eyes, and sees that while she dreamed
The night has fallen and the darkness lies
Dense and half-palpable upon the room,

And on her senses and her heavy heart.
She hears the pattering of tiny feet,
The rustle in the curtain of the mouse,
Unconscious of her presence; in the elms
The sighing and the swaying of the wind,
The falling of large rain-drops on the roof,
The tapping of the ivy at the pane;
And suddenly a panic seizes her,—
A ghostly atmosphere is in the place,
And with a beating heart and faltering step
She gropes her way through darkness to the door
And fumbles for the lock her nervous hand
Can scarce discover, while she deems she hears
Something that breathes behind her—feels a stir
About her in the hot and languid air,
And as she turns her head, half-desperate

To face the Something, suddenly the room
Leaps into livid light and back again
To densest darkness, and above her head
The crashing thunder rends the troubled sky.

Sometimes he came to visit her in dreams;
But as the months went by, and time enlarged
The breach that lay between her life and his,
Slumber grew vaguely conscious of the change,
But, dull to understand its nature, brought
Most weary vexing visions.—Now he came
With look estranged and cold averted eye;
Now far away she saw him wandering slow
Mid scenes she knew not, and in vain she sought
To reach him, or to win a backward look
By voice and gesture; on his distant way
He went, and passed unheeding from her sight.—

And still the yearning and the trouble grew,
And still the aching sense of loss and want
Sat like a nightmare on her brooding heart.

It is a suffering that most women know,
Or have known, even in the happiest lives,
To sit at home through uneventful days
And ply unchanging tasks from which the life
And spirit have departed with the presence
Of one who made home Paradise, earth Heaven,
Or so it seems, comparing yesterday
With lone, bereft to-day.—But most of these
Have some strong link, present and tangible
With the loved absent.—Letters pass between
On whose broad pages are spilt forth the wealth
Of souls love-laden; hope, fear, tenderness,
Regret, encouragement, fond lookings back

To that which has been ; aspirations strong
Towards that which may be. Gentle messages,
Or loving talk of them with mother, friend,
Sister or brother, while the needle plies
Its morning task, or by the evening hearth
When day is dying in the arms of Night :
Or friendly mention by unconscious lips,
Or hope of quick return. Not one of these
Soothers of absence did Virginia know.
She might not write to him, no written word
Of his might reach her: no kind mutual friend
Could give her news of him, tell her he sped
Or well or ill: his name was silent now
On every lip; the very neighbours shrunk
From speaking it beneath her father's roof,
Knowing 'twas there unwelcome as himself:—
And as weeks grew to months, months into years,

She felt the hope of seeing him recede
Further and further into distance dim.

The mother that so loved her, did not she
With mother's watchful jealous eye perceive
The weight that hung upon her darling's heart?
Perchance at times she thought Virginia 'dull;'
She'd loved her cousin,—cousinly, of course,—
From childhood,—doubtless she must miss him now;
But he'd proved undeserving, and 'twere best
Not to remind her of him by a word
Even of censure, best to let the thought
Die utterly. It may be there were times,
Moments of inspiration faint, that when
She saw a paleness on Virginia's cheek,
An absent languor in her clear blue eye,
A darkened circle round it, some dim guess

Of how and why the change was wrought would cross
Her dull perception. At such times, perhaps,
Again the thought of her dead sister rose
And caused a little stir about her heart,
As the thick sluggish waters of a pool
Are stirred an instant when from out the ooze
The air imprisoned bursts in bubbles bright
Up to the surface. Then the solemn fool
She called Experience bid her duly note
That sister's ending; charged her by the love
She bore her child, never by word or deed
To encourage any feeling that might tend
Towards the working out of such a fate
For her in future years. And so she closed
Her eyes and heart, and said the thing would pass,
'Twas but a young girl's whim:—a day would come
Some able-bodied wooer of the type

Of the two hulking louts her soul was proud
To call her sons, would bring a well-filled purse
A broad hand and a narrow heart to win
Her girlish fancy.—Meantime it were well
To make occasion for the bringing forth
Of such most wisht event :—the life they led
Was too retired; flowers that bloom unseen
Bloom utterly in vain and die ungathered.

BOOK III

CANTO I.

I

"I said when young, 'Beauty's the supreme joy,
Her I will choose, and in all forms will face her,
Eye to eye, lip to lip; and so embrace her
With my whole heart.' I said this being a boy.

II.

'First, I will seek her — naked or clad only
In her own god-head, as I know of yore
Great bards beheld her.' So by sea and shore
I sought her, and amid the mountains lonely.

VI.

'Next I will seek her — in all shapes of wood,
Or brass or marble; or in colours clad;
And sensuous lines to make my spirit glad.
And she shall change her dress with every mood.'"

OWEN MEREDITH.

BOOK III.

CANTO I.

In vain Œnopion lays a traitorous hand
Upon the slumbering Orion's eyes:—
'Rise,' saith the Oracle, 'and wend thy way
'Eastward, and let the light of Phœbus' orbs
'Fall upon thine: so shall thy sight return.'
Slowly from off his teeming mother's breast
Groaning the blinded giant lifts himself,
And in default of sight to guide his steps
Employs his hearing. Far away resounds
The clash of hammers at the Lemnian forge,
And thither slow he turns his darkling way.

So, to this day, the fable still applies.
When to the Earth is born a giant son
'Tis vain to bind or blind him. In his soul
An oracle there dwells that bids him rise
And turn to some Hyperion whose blaze
Will give him light. And from some mighty forge,
Upon whose anvils human brains are wrought
He hears the clank and crash that guide his steps.
But once arrived at Lemnos, there remains
The task of finding a Cedalion
To guide his further progress; for the way
To the bright East may not be found alone.

Such was our hero's plight: the weary miles
That lay 'twixt London and his former home

Were traverst now, but the vast city held
Among its tens of thousands not one face
Familiar to his eyes ; no single hand
That ever had held his with friendly clasp.
His little stock of coin was well nigh spent,
He could not dig, to beg he was ashamed,
His plan to seek employment at the hands
Of sculptors known by name as yet had brought
But disappointment and rejection oft
Coucht in such terms as stung him to the quick
And sickened him with pain unshared, untold.

At length well nigh despairing, he resolved
To make a desperate — might be last attempt
To drive the wolf, starvation, from the door.
On the brief list of sculptors' names he knew

A single one remained yet unaddrest:
So, in a mood far less akin to hope
Than to despair, he turned unwilling steps
To Franklyn's studio.
See the lad arrived,
He tells his simple story, asks for work,
No matter what, so it may only be
Work that may ever bring him, hand and eye,
In contact with the glorious forms conceived
By Genius dead or living,—that may teach
The unskilled hand, the inexperienc'd eye
To shape the brain's imaginings, give form
And solid semblance to the lovely shadows
That haunt him still, evok't from every book
Of his loved poets: from the Bible first,
Later from Spenser's all-suggestive page,
The ancient Spanish chronicles, the lines

Of him who 'done to death by slanderous tongues' *
In his first manhood laid his weary head
To rest on alien shores. From misty glens,
From woods the Dryads haunt, from moaning seas,
From his remembered mountains. Oh to learn
The craft that makes these airy phantasies
That are less tangible than gossamers
On summer eves, immortal as the gods!

And Franklyn listened with a searching eye
And lip that scarcely smiled. The story told—
(With calm commencement, gathering by degrees
Fervour and hope, spirit and energy) —
The sculptor took the aspirant's nervous hand
In his broad palm, "My lad, I'll give you work,
I'll find it or I'll make it, for I think

* Keats.

The day may come you'll do me credit yet.
But, to begin, I'll turn you to account,
If it so please you. Yours is just the head
I need as model for a work in hand,
A young Amphion: will you choose to sit?
While I am working you can look around
And I can talk to you and teach you much
You've got to learn before you touch the clay.
Is it a bargain? here's my hand on it!
Return to-morrow at the stroke of noon."
Oh hope! Oh joy! Orion nears the East.

A sculptor's studio, when you enter first,
Looks much unlike Elysium, albeit
Inhabited by many of the gods
And daintiest goddesses, whose silver feet
Are wont to tread on flow'rs; whose lucent limbs

Recline on clouds, or lave them in the flow
Of Ida's diamond founts, while songs of birds
And odours of divinest blooms commingle
Into one rapturous stream of homage due.
  Behold a vast, damp, dirty, dreary den
About whose cobwebbed raftered roof there hang
No scents but those of plaster and wet clay
Mingled with fumes of the nicotian weed:
Here sound no melodies but careless songs
Half sung, half whistled, while the workman plies
His chisel on the marble, kneads the clay,
Or with coarse dripping rags enwraps the form
Of hero, nymph, or saint. In such abode
The Thunderer lifts aloft his threatening arm
Ready to hurl destruction on the head
Of the last season's Beauty, who has given
The final sitting for her bust to grace

The gallery of the Earl whose coronet
Will shortly circle that white polisht brow.
Fair Aphrodite lays her lovely limbs
At Martin Luther's feet ; Diana stands
Beside Aspasia, Psyche waves her wings
O'er Samuel Johnson's head, while Eros aims
A dart at Apemantus.

In the midst,

Apollo-like, a slight, yet well-knit youth,
But featureless, stands holding out a lyre
He seems to contemplate ;— the Muses' gift
Being but new-received, and yet unguest,
Even by himself, the latent power that lies
Within his nervous hand to call forth strains
That rocks and trees must march to at his will.
And here the work, close on completion, stood,
Waiting, like spell-bound prince in faëry-tale,

Until some pitying mortal should consent
To lend it features. Glad might Franklyn be
To find upon his would-be pupil's face
The very traits long-sought; the thoughtful brow,
And beauteous melancholy eyes foredoomed
To weep a mother's wrongs and children's blood.

So, while the sculptor wrought the model gazed,
Filling his thirsty artist soul brimful
With grace and loveliness and majesty.
How his eye followed the divine contours,
The sweeping lines, the curves, the swells, the falls;
The turn of Juno's head, of Venus' hand!
Here a trait undulating, sinuous
Without an angle down from neck to heel,
(Wherein you trace at once the origin
Of the old Lamia-legend,) there a line

In which the thew and sinew hold the bone
In such embrace as gnarlèd ivy holds
The iron oak. Again succeeds a form
Where supple grace and dignity severe,—
(The Eve and Adam joined in union meet),—
Complete each other and delight the eye
With tempered majesty, pure, bland, and strong.

And Franklyn wrought in silence, for he saw
The pupil drank instruction through the eye,
Or more, perhaps, as yet, a fervid sense
Of Beauty in such deep and copious draughts
His brain was half-intoxicate, and till
The first delirium had past he saw
'Twere vain to pour into unlistening ears
Rules, elements and principles; to show
The process by which human brains and hands

Conceived and shap't those god-begotten forms.
He knew full well how soon the day would come
When such instruction would be hungered for,
And, though less honied to the taste, devoured
As eagerly as now was swallowed down
The beauty; how the soul once satisfied
With the effect would seek to learn the cause.

Among the varied diff'rences that lie
Between the man and woman, you may note
A very signal and important one. O'er man
The glorious despot, Art, will often hold
Most absolute and undivided sway.
Free and by choice he comes to worship her
All for herself, and on his neck she lays
Her golden yoke, and to her shining car
He lets her bind him: — onward he must fare

Just where her will directs ; none else with her
May share his adoration ; jealous she
Of all who seek to win a look, a thought
From her sworn vassal who has chos'n to vow
Allegiance.

With the woman 'tis not so.

Rarely, if ever, while her heart is young
And strong with love of Life and love of Love
She brings it whole and lays it at the feet
Of the grand Tyrant. First she offers it
To Love : Love in the saintly filial garb,
Love in the royal-red Hyperion robe
Of passion; in the holy dress that wraps
The child upon the breast of motherhood;
And only when Love fails her, or is torn
From her wrung bosom, does she bring to Art
The wounded heart as yet too hot and strong

And vibrating with youth and life and power
To be thrown by as useless. And though she
Have sworn allegiance to this second thane
The memory of the first, the best-beloved,
The darling chosen master, haunts her still,
And makes her best of service incomplete.

Yet if the homage sovereign Love exacts
Be less exclusive than that claimed by Art,
Far wider his dominion. Though awhile
Art may suffice to fill her vot'ry's days,
Supply the place of parent, mistress, child,
Be to him all things, yet the day will come
When he discovers that her goddess-ship
Takes all and renders little ; that to kneel
Down in the dust and kiss her garment's hem
Suffices not to fill a starving heart:

She foils possession, fails in tenderness,
Refuses sympathy, and while she claims
Incessant service ever boasts the while
She has no need of him, that to herself
Herself is all in all. And so it haps
That soon or late the all-embracing King
Brings him to sweeter bondage, — not refusing
To share the sway with her, if she consent
To rule in part where once she wholly ruled.

So Arthur flung his passionate poet heart
Down in the dust at his great mistress' feet,
And swore to be her slave, her veriest thrall
Thenceforth for ever.
Thus the months went by
Each born so silently, each dying out
With such a quiet sigh he noted not

How with their course his fevered life rusht on
In toil and fret and hopes and wild despairs;
How days of labour passed, and restless nights
Brought wrathful discontent with all the fruits
Of those most arduous days; — even at times
A moment's passion would annihilate
That which a week's most steady patient pains
Had brought far on to ripeness; there were days
When words of praise from Franklyn stirred his heart
To hot and foolish anger, as a child
Oft chafes at misplaced pity, or attempts
At ill-timed soothing, when the evil mood
Broods darkly o'er his spirit. So it is
Too oft with genius: like a butterfly
Prisoned within a green-house all the blooms
Whose glories drew him thither cease to fill
The measure of his wishes; 'gainst the glass

That will not let him soar up to the sun
Frantic he beats his palpitating wings,
The more the pain the more the frenzy grows,
And suffering and effort and desire
Merge in one constant fever and forbid
All sense of peace, contentment, or repose.

Yet such the universal law. On earth
All that is worthiest is brought to life
With effort and with anguish ; in the press
The grape must lose its beauty and its bloom,
And all its blood must fester and ferment
Before within the crystal cup it gleams
Like molten rubies or like sunbeams trapt.
To win the diamond from the darksome mine
And place it glittering on the breast or brow
Of sovereign beauty, months of sweat and toil

Must be expended; Man himself must come
With agonising throes and risk and dread
Into the very world in which he reigns
Vicegerent of the Eternal Lord of all;
And ere his soul, emancipate and free,
Springs up to Heaven from the second birth,
It must have known the struggle, pang and fear,
Have been dragged downwards shuddering to the gates
Of that dark tenement where moulders now
The flesh, its late companion.

But alas!

It happens, now and then, that ere the wine
Be clarified the working juice is spilt;
The diamond, yet unpolisht, may be lost,
The babe die at the birth, the immortal soul,
Imperishable though it be, may fall

Down to dark depths instead of soaring up
When comes the hour of parting with its clay.

The battle therefore must be fought ; but we
Have yet the power to put on mail of proof
To arm ourselves and stand upon our guard,
Be temperate, hopeful, strong, not overbold
But still less over-timid ; more than all
See that we fight for Truth ; so, in the end
The Crown is ours, if not on earth in Heaven !

BOOK III.

CANTO II.

"Alas, I still see something to be done,
And what I do falls short of what I see
Though I waste myself on doing. Long green days
Worn bare of grass and sunshine, — long calm nights,
From which the silken sleeps were fretted out,
Be witness for me, with no amateur's
Irreverent haste and busy idleness
I've set myself to Art! What then? what's done?
What's done at last?"

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

"Live — yet live —
Shall sharpest pathos blight us, knowing all
Life needs for life is possible to will —
* * * Should my shadow cross thy thoughts
Too sadly for thy peace, remand it thou
For calmer hours to memory's darkest hold.
If not to be forgotten — not at once —
Not all forgotten."

TENNYSON.

BOOK III.

CANTO II.

It boots not we should follow, step by step,
Through all the tangled mazes of his course,
Our hero toiling up the steep ascent
Whose summit, hid in clouds, may scarce be gained.
Howe'er we mount and climb, height above height
Still towers upwards, hope remains hope still,
Waiting fulfilment till—the Judgment Day.

For seven years he served apprenticeship
To his great mistress; seven years he toiled,
And strove, and workt, and worshipt for a smile
That now and then her goddess-ship vouchsafed.

But 'tis the property of natures deep,
And strong, and fervent still to love and serve
With pain and self-abasement; still to deem
Their service all unworthy, their advance
Mere crawling; still to look ahead and note
The distance to be gained, never to turn
A backward glance to see what's *been* achieved
Since first they started in crude ignorance
Of the mere elements of that which now
They seem to common mortals to have learned
And mastered in its utmost depth and height.
And yet, naught daunted in the main, but strong
In hope and perseverance, still they stride
Towards the bright, distant, still-receding goal.

Now enter we our Arthur's studio:—see
Where the creator gazes, face to face,

On his creation :—in his changing eye
Read love, hope, admiration, discontent
Succeeding each the other. Now he stands,
At distance, taking in the general whole,
The combination of the lines and traits
Which, after years of separate study, flow
As softly, each to its appointed place,
And due proportion in the mass, as streams
Within their boundaries. Now near he draws,
Examines, alters, finishes, improves,
Retouches here a curl, a dimple there,
Retreats, returns, works, hopes, and frets, and
fears.

Thus the creator. To the thing create
Now let us turn. Behold it where it stands,
Calm, pure, and chaste in nudity sublime,—

Venus Anthéia, wreathed and crowned with flowers.
No trouble is there in the full-orbed eye,
Nor on the low smooth brow :—the perfect lips
Nor smile nor sigh ; in all the face divine
Passion is mute, and calm perfection throws
The stillness of her silent harmony
O'er face and form. Its mission on the earth
Is to be beautiful, nor less nor more.
It is not meant that it should typify
Or represent this feeling, that idea,
But just that it should fill the gazer's soul
So brimful with the sense of loveliness
He asks for nothing further.
But while limb
And feature each day make more near approach
To that ideal stampt on Arthur's brain,
One thing is still awanting. Vain as yet

Has proved his eager and untiring search
After a living model of a hand
Such as he dreams of, but has never seen
In ripe perfection. A white, slender hand,
Warm, soft, of thrilling pressure, rosy-palmed,
And azure-veined; from wrist to finger-tips
A combination of soft flowing lines
And blending undulations; fingers round
And curved a little backwards at the points
As though their sensitiveness drew them back,
Shrinking instinctive from the sense of touch.
An airy fluttering hand that now may catch
A passing butterfly, nor rub away
A grain of gold-dust from his painted wings;
A cool, slow-motioned hand that now can smooth
The pain from tired brows. A hand that looks
In profile not unlike a greyhound's head.

Ah me, ah me! at intervals from far
Rises a shadowy vision of a hand
That bears relation to the one he seeks,
As buds to full-blown roses. A dear hand
That loving led him once,—Virginia's hand.
And then he deeply sighs, and wandering thought
Goes back to that sweet vision of his first
And purest youth, and his long dormant heart
Stirs with a waking sense of love and pain,
Regret and longing, and a consciousness
Of wrong done, and neglect and wilful loss
Of a mis-prizèd treasure cast away
And lost for ever. Doubtless now that hand
And that sweet heart are given to a man
More worthy the possession;—doubtless now
Himself is banisht from her lightest thought;
Ah well, 'tis vain to think what might have been;

Art's slave must hope not to be woman's love :—
There stands his mistress ; that still, beauteous thing
Whose large untiring eyes nor smile nor weep,
But gaze unwinking on the mid-day sun :
That calm perfection, whose most exquisite lips
Thrill with no kisses given nor received,
Whose faultless bosom throbs not with the pulse
Of a warm, eager, foolish, fluttering heart
That loves and hopes and fears, torments itself
And that which best it loves with jealousies
And idlest dreams and fancies :—that most fair
And fadeless image, that can know no change
From age nor care nor sickness, that will still,
When the poor hand that shaped it lies in dust,
Enchant the gazer with perennial charms.
  Yes, he has chosen wisely, yes—but yet—
Well, he *has* chosen, and must now abide

By that unbiast and deliberate choice.
"And so, sweet goddess, thou shalt be my love,
Beseech thee, smile on me, inspire my hand
To give thee that perfection that my soul
Fully conceives, but that as yet in vain
I seek in all completeness to express.
Thou 'rt mine, divinest image, wholly mine,
Born of my teeming brain, shaped by my hand;
Ere yet a trait of thy most beauteous form
Emerged from the dull mass of humid clay
I saw thee in my dreams as faultless as
I hope to make thee. Ah, no ingrate thou!
Thou wilt reward me with the loveliness
Thou owest me,—it ne'er can change nor fade;
No faithlessness have I to fear from thee,
No slight, no disappointment, strife nor fret.
I will be wiser than the Cyprian king,

Nor sigh to make thee mortal. Better far
The pure, chaste essence of thy loveliness
Than all the cloying sweets of sensuous joys!"

And still he wrought, and still he strove to think
That, clearly, he had chos'n the better part.
For seven years the son of Isaac served,
Secure of winning Rachel;—and behold
When all was done 'twas Leah he had gained!
The story's old; yet, like all tales of life
As new as old: most Rachels on the earth
Unveiled, prove only Leahs in disguise;
And happy he who having struggled through
Another seven attains the rightful prize.
There are not many do it, as I think;
Not many that are wise to recognise
In quiet eyes, a pale, grave, thoughtful brow,

A slow smile and an even sober step
Tempered by years and care, the very Rachel
Their hot youth yearned for ; for 'twas otherwise,
In other colours hot youth painted her ;
And oft when she with calm, pure, holy eyes
And hand extended, murmurs, " Here am I,
I thou desired'st ; take me, I am thine
For earth and Heaven," they turn with sullen brow,
Saying, " The Rachel of my dreams was bright
As summer noon, a flashing eye had she,
Cheeks rosier than the morning's, tresses rich
And burnisht with white lustre on the deep
Intensity of darkness. Such was she,
My Rachel,—go—I'll seek her through the world,
For surely I shall find her soon or late."

Ay, commonly we find the thing we seek
Sooner or later ; but the mischief lies

In this, that often when the prize appears
We fail to recognise it, or have lost
The appetite to enjoy it. Ah well, well,
This sorely incomplete, scant, patchy life,
'Neath all its crosses, inconsistencies,
Checks, curbings, contradictions, puzzles, frets,
Flows with an under-current swift and deep
Straight strong and steadfast to the boundless sea:
And though upon its surface eddies whirl
Tormented foam and froth and leaves and sticks,
Though rocks stand up to chafe it, hills to turn
Its course in endless windings; though the things
It prizes most are oftentimes engulft,
Not altered is its course, not less the vast
Illimitable deep receives it still.
Only the Ocean of Eternity

Waters two shores ; behoves us to decide
Early towards which we bend our onward way.

Thus he, the Artist, great in being such
In truth and earnest, but yet incomplete
In being more an Artist than a Man.
Now let us look beyond the backward years
To her he left behind.
Upon her home
The change of Death has fallen :—the dull house
No longer owns its master ; in the church
A tablet, most respectable, declares
His shining virtues as churchwarden ; how
In all relations of his faultless life
He stood a pattern to parishioners,
And how most edifying was his end.
The big broad-shouldered brothers both are gone—

It matters little whither, — to obtain
The gifts that fortune cannot be so blind
As to withhold from them. And now alone
In the dull chambers dwell two quiet souls : —
One still more pale and faded than of yore,
And yet, at times, with something in the eyes
Not quite unpleasing. One divinely fair,
With an ethereal beauty in blue eyes,
Through which the holy light of a pure soul
Burns calm and steady with a lambent flame
That warms and purifies and shows the way
That men should take to find the road to Heaven.
A grey still life is hers; not dark, not dark;
Through the dim twilight shines in Heaven there
A constant star; and she has grown so used
To look up to it that she hardly sees
How dark the world is round her.

Does she think
Often of Arthur ?
In the early days
When first she lost him, (lost him ! Ah, that word
She could not utter then ! the very sound
Was too prophetic ; lost means something more
Than present separation ; 'tis a word
The angels utter weeping), day and night
His memory companioned her, and Hope
Still made the third beside them. Further on
Hope, wanting food, grew weary weak and faint,
And lagged behind, and wider, day by day,
The distance waxt between them till at last
Hope faded to a speck. Then her Love's image
Changed to a ghost. It was not less beloved —
Oh never less beloved! —but still a ghost
That haunted her until her star of life

Burnt lurid in its presence, and her soul
Waxt weary with its pacings to and fro
In such weird company.
Then she resolved
To exorcise it. Not for ever, Oh,
Never for ever!—but no more to allow
It still to walk beside her day and night,
Claiming her whole attention:—she decreed
With her strong resolute steadfast heart and will
That only when she knelt before the Throne
Of the Most Highest it might come to her
And be presented, interceded for,
And blest and pardoned and accepted there.
Not for her sake, not for her happiness,
Not to be made her own; to God she left
The shaping of its earthly destiny,—
But this she claimed, with confidence that grew

A rapture of security, — that when
Brief Time was swallowed in Eternity
A place in Heaven should await her love : —
And thus prayer grew a thousand-fold more sweet
And he a thousand-fold more purely dear.

I know there are but few who deem the Will
Can act thus on the mind. The thought, they say,
Is free, and when the heart is full, brimful,
With some one certain image, then the thoughts
Will babble of it, and the sternest Will
Cannot forbid them. But I say it can;
Not at the first, not always ; there must be
Unwinking vigilance, — indulgence none, —
Surprises, struggles, battlings, fiercest strife
And wrestling foot to foot; but ah, be sure
The Will, when virtuous, conquers in the end!

It proved so with Virginia. As the months,
Holding each other by the hand, extended
Into the circles of the years, her mind
Under this constant steady discipline
Grew to so firm a frame, so well-controlled,
So wedded to a calm unflinching faith
Respecting the far Future; so resigned
As to the Present, that at last the thought
Of Arthur lost that crushing sense of pain
And hopeless longing, and remembrance grew
Endurable as is the sight of graves
When years have clothed them with fresh-scented grass
And flowers that reconcile them with the turf
That covers up no corpse. She now might dwell
Calmly upon his memory, speculate
Reflective on the possibilities

Attendant on his course. How fared he now?
Had Fate been kind? would the day ever come
When her glad heart might leap to hear the sound
Of his belovèd name read in the list
Of those the nation honoured? Rarely she
Allowed herself to think *might* the day come
She should again behold him face to face?
When that thought rose she checkt it with a quick
Involuntary sigh and turned the course
Of her discursive musings to some theme
Less dangerous, as men divert their steps
When heedless wanderings bring them near the brink
Of some abyss whose overhanging banks
Afford but treacherous footing.

Thus her life
Flowed on, not brightly, but clear deep and calm, —

Not flashing in the sunlight, but serene
And cool and silent 'neath the silver moon.

Of all these changes in her daughter's heart
The mother reckt not. Oftentimes she mourned
And sometimes chided that Virginia's eye
Gave cold discouragement to many a one
Who sought to win more kindness; but as time
Stole on and the concentrate quiet force
Of the girl's character revealed itself
Its influence wrought silently upon
The mother's faint pale nature. By degrees
The love she bore Virginia seemed to grow
Into unconscious reverence:—whate'er
Virginia did, Virginia thought or said
She tacitly accepted as the thing—
The only thing—should still be done or thought

Or said unquestioned. Sometimes there would rise
A sigh, a half regret that — well no doubt
Virginia knew full well what would be best
To make her happiness; no doubt the day
Would bring the man. So quietly she turned
Back to her knitting and her harmless thoughts
In full security.

And while she knit

And while Virginia schooled her heart and while
Our Arthur wrought and pined, the Time grew big
In silence to the birth of new events
Whose advent further pages must record.

BOOK III.

CANTO III.

"I take thy hand; this hand,
As soft as dove's down, and as white as it,
Or Ethiopian's tooth, or the fann'd snow that's bolted
By the northern blasts twice o'er."

SHAKESPEARE.

BOOK III.

CANTO III.

"PROVE all things," says the Bible:—"Prove all
things;
Then cleave to that which thou hast provèd good."
The latitude is large, the liberty
Unbounded:—anti-Romish teaching this,
(Like most things in the Bible). Thou hast eyes
And hands and brain and heart; well, see thou then
How thou can'st make them serve thee for the best.
Despise not teaching; listen to the words
Of those proved wiser than thyself: nay more,
There are men, women, children, in the world

Less wise than thou and humbler and more weak
Have yet a word it boots thee much to hear.
So listen; and when starting on thy course
Pause by the wayside now and then and cut
One of these staves from out the hedge to aid
Thine onward journey; but of this beware
Thou turn them not from their legitimate use,
Employing them as crutches. Babes that learn
To walk in go-carts take a mighty time
To learn to walk alone. "But if I fall?"
Thou say'st, "wanting support;" well, children fall
Full fifty times a day and are not hurt
Beyond a bruise or scratch. "But if I lose
My way because I do not ask the road
At every turn of those more learn'd than I?"
And did Columbus fear to lose his way
For want of beacons, some few centuries past,

And leave the sun alone to travel west
And know an unknown world ?
Of this be sure
That led or unled thou wilt often fall,
But surely thou had'st better fall thyself
When walking boldly, knowing *why* thou fall'st
And profiting by this experience,
Than be dragged downward, when another trips
Thou'rt following blindly, never knowing why ?
That which thou learn'st thyself will penetrate
Into thy heart and brain, will be thine own
To guide and guard thee; that which thou acquirest
On other men's experience enters not,
But when the hour of test and trial comes
Slips on one side, as globes of morning dew
Glide from the rose-leaf, leaving it all dry.
The point, I take it, chiefly lies in this,

Before thou startest on thine onward course
Study with all thy might to make it clear
That thou hast chosen the right one; then step out
In brave good earnest; turn thou not aside
To right or left until thou'st fully proved
Thou hast errèd in thy choice: for thou may'st err
Being not infallible; but even then
Weep not nor wail; there's no need to retrace
All that long weary way:—thou'lt surely find
With diligent seeking further on a path
Will lead thee to the right one;—what thou'st learned
Will not be lost; 'twill serve thee nigh as well
(Better in some things, having undergone
The test of failure) as if full success
Had crowned thine enterprise. But Oh beware
Of hasty judgments, leading, as they must,
To *frequent* failure, undermining faith

And self-reliance; wasting precious time,
Making a man a very weather-cock,
Telling the way the wind blows, but himself
Nor blowing hot nor cold nor wet nor dry.

Ay, preaching's easy when the pain and pang
And horrible discouragement that grow
Out of the sense of failure are past by
And the true road's discovered. But meanwhile
The tossings to and fro of doubt and dread,
The sense of weakness, dim bewilderment,
Mistrust and self-contempt when all our light
Is proved to be but darkness are not things
To smile at. When the surgeon's scalpel carves
Into the quivering flesh, though 'tis to cure,
The present agony is just as keen
As though 'twere used for killing. Heaven grant

The patient may have strength to struggle through
And be restored, not crusht, as natures weak
Or obstinate, or easily imprest,
Or wanting buoyancy too often are.

When by the gate of Erfurt Heaven's bolt
By Martin Luther's side struck down Alexis
The future scourge of papacy arose
From his friend's senseless corse and made a vow
Henceforth to serve God in the way he then
Deemed solely perfect and acceptable :—
He took the cowl, became—his own words tell—
"A pious monk," wept, fasted, laboured, prayed,
Devoted all his great heroic soul
To the service of the lie that afterward
He above all men proved such.

Then there came

A terrible doubt, not breathed by voice of man
But by the voice of God in his heart's depths
That what he worshipt was no real sun
Of glory but an ignis fatuus !

Then all was merged and utterly o'erwhelmed
In inner darkness of the sepulchre
Peopled with ghosts and devils. At the last
The East began to whiten ; by degrees
Grey grew to golden, and the great bright Sun
O'erflooded him with glory ! By that light,
Made visible in the Bible, which he bore
As sword and shield, he thenceforth marcht along
Against the powers of darkness and to raise
The prisoners of darkness from their dens.

Therefore let no man who fails once believe

That he has failed for ever : — let him think
On Martin Luther whose first error proved
The path to Truth for him and for the world.

"Rain ! will it never *never* cease to rain ?
All day, all night upon the plashy street,
Upon the roofs that wear a sickly shine
In the wan sickly light that rather seems
A feebler darkness through November fog : —
Against the window blurred with wet and dirt,
Straight down the chimney, hissing in the fire,
And down, down, down for ever on my nerves
This dreary rain falls on. I would it fell
Upon my grave ! Oh, to lie husht and still,
No sound in these keen ears that still convey
All jarring echoes inwards ; in the balls
Of these most weary eyes no sense of sight,

In all this sensuous frame no consciousness
Of pain — and worse — the weariness that knows
No rest but ever seeks in restlessness
For change, failing repose! To feel no more
This constant crushing pressure on the heart
Which from intensity of mental pain
Grows also to a physical distress
And will not let me breathe. Oh to obtain
Rest, rest, eternal rest! Ay, there's the question;
Will the rest be eternal? O my God! —
For there's a God, forget Him how we may —
When I was well and strong and full of life
And full of life's bright hope and energy
And power to dare and do, but little thought
Of Thee and of Thy gifts and of my need
Of Thy continuing bounty crost my brain.
God, I forsook Thee; in Thy justice Thou

Forsak'st me utterly. No peace on earth,
No love, no care, no comfort, and in Heaven
Worse than no hope! Most literally I've made
Unto myself dull idols out of clay
And worshipt them! and now in my dire need
Behold their aid and comfort! Oh, to have failed
So hopelessly! And here — here is the thing
That kills me in the failure, — I've succeeded
In winning outwardly the thing I sought!

Among the sculptors of the time I stand
Almost alone in proud pre-eminence.
No works, they say, like his; my Cyane
Is called the wonder of the age, my Circe
A new Ulysses in each gazer finds;
And now the crown and triumph of my skill,
My floral Venus, only waits for hands

To shame her predecessors. She may wait!
Two of the best years of my fullest life
I've given her, and still she's incomplete
And I lie dying!
But a year ago
I'd have given — ay, some of my heart's best blood
To find a hand on which to model hers;
And now I'd give as much to find a hand
Not beautiful, but soft and womanly,
With pulse that beat responsive to a heart,
To hold in mine, to smooth my aching brow,
To hand my physic, draw my curtain back,
And soothe the troubled beatings of my heart
With soft magnetic pressure.
O Virginia,
O my lost love! how well art thou avenged!
Where art thou now, Virginia? — I believe —

For well I know her steadfast heart — that long
My white dove hoped and waited for a sign
Of her false mate's return, — some olive-leaf
To say that mid the wide and weary waste
Of the world's waters soon he hoped to find
A spot where he and she might rest secure
The soles of wandering feet. Alas, alas!
Since from the ark of her sweet heart I fled
I've found no other footing on the flood.
And she? I dare not think of it — which way
So e'er I turn the thought is agony!
Either she pined deserted, all her love
Grown bitterness and anguish, or in time
She gave it to another. Now, perhaps,
He sits beside her, holds her hand, that hand!
While children — his — are climbing round her knees,
And — O Virginia — O my love, my heart!

Have pity ! once more let me see thy face,
This, this, at least I swear, no other form
Of living woman has my soul desired,
No other image, sweet, than thine has shone
Across my path : —jealous thou can'st not be
Of those cold senseless shapes of clay and stone,
My somewhile idols. Come, Virginia, come !
I stretch my arms to thee, to thee, beloved !
Across the waste of years I send my soul
To meet thee coming ! Bring me, — bring me hope
And love and peace and Heaven ! I am young
But young to die, Virginia ! "

Down he sinks
Exhausted on the couch, his outstretcht arms
Drop nerveless on the coverlet, his eyes
Gaze dim on vacancy, then slowly close,
And the pale life within him staggers, wanes

And swooning falls. And drearily the rain
Beats 'gainst the window, drearily the wind
Moans in the chimney as the night draws on.

Not long the trance continues; by degrees
The blackness of Death's presence that obscured
The flickering life-light grows less palpable,
And the dim lamp again begins to make
The darkness less opaque. As one who lies
In listless languor on a summer morn
Upon his couch, and sees with upturned eyes
The formless shadows of the passers-by
Across the ceiling softly come and go,
So Arthur sees the shadows of the past
Glide silently before him. Now once more
He sits, as that last solemn night he sat
In the dark chamber underneath the roof,

Waiting to hear a step upon the stair,
A hand upon the lock — whose fingers drop
Myrrh on the handles; in his dream he feels
The past and present mingle with a sad
And vague entanglement; a painful sense
Of long estrangement, unexplained but strong
And most oppressive, weighs upon his heart,
The while those long-forgotten days become
Once more the actual time. In vain he strives
To clear the matter; and yet all the while
He listens for the footstep on the stair,
The hand upon the lock.

Now grows the dream
More vivid, more life-like: — again the stair
Creaks 'neath the mounting footstep, and the lock
Yields to the hand: — across the dark'ning room
He hears and feels her coming,—in his heart

A vague, delicious recognising trouble
Stirs at her presence! Oh the dream's too sweet
Ever to be dispelled! 'tis but a dream
He knows, but when such visions visit us
Like fairies they should still be entertained,
For if from off their faces we withdraw
Our eyes or thoughts an instant they are gone!
But Oh, he'll keep his fairy visitant!—
Concentrate all the forces of his soul
To bring and keep her nearer. Lo, he draws
Her closer, closer yet, he feels her bend
Above him, yes,—feels with an actual start—
The thing's so strangely real!—a cool hand
Rest on his burning brow, a fragrant breath
Trembling amid the roots of the loose curls
That lie about his temples. Something stirs
Within him, telling him he *must* wake now

And so his eyes unclose.

Unclose to meet

The swimming eyes, the tremulous warm mouth,

All the whole face divine that years ago

Shone in its light of holy loveliness

On the lone orphan boy. Again his heart

And arms are stretcht to greet it, in his clasp

He holds her unresisting, all his own,

And in the silence he can feel and hear

Their two hearts beating. With shut eyes he lies,

Sensation all concentred in the lips

That hers are clinging to. Oh how the Life

Leaps up within us, young and strong and full,

When Love appears to take it by the hand

And bid it stand and walk !

Long time the trance

Continued till the tears began to flow ;

Then words came broken, indistinct, and still
By kisses interrupted. He'd so much
To ask and hear, she had so much to tell!
No matter now the how and where and when —
To-morrow he'd be stronger ;— she was come
To be his nurse,—if he would let her ?—would he ?—
(If she had deemed refusal possible
She had not askt permission : — only those
Who know themselves beloved ever demand
The question, Do you love me ?)
At those words
The outstretcht arms and smile and murmur claimed
A fresh embrace.
And so the hours stole on
And still the rain fell, still the winter moaned
Around the dim-lit chamber which contained
All spring and summer blended in two hearts.

And while they talk he takes Virginia's hand
And turns, examines, gazes and admires,
Strokes, kisses, and for its sweet sake forgives
Venus Anthéia, who so angered him
An hour ago: — yes, she no more shall be
A helpless cripple. Art, grand Art, shall still
Obtain his homage — in the second place—
Love claims the first: — and King Love being blind,
The monarch and his votary will both
Require a hand to guide them; — let it be
The hand that led them erst, VIRGINIA'S HAND!

THE END.

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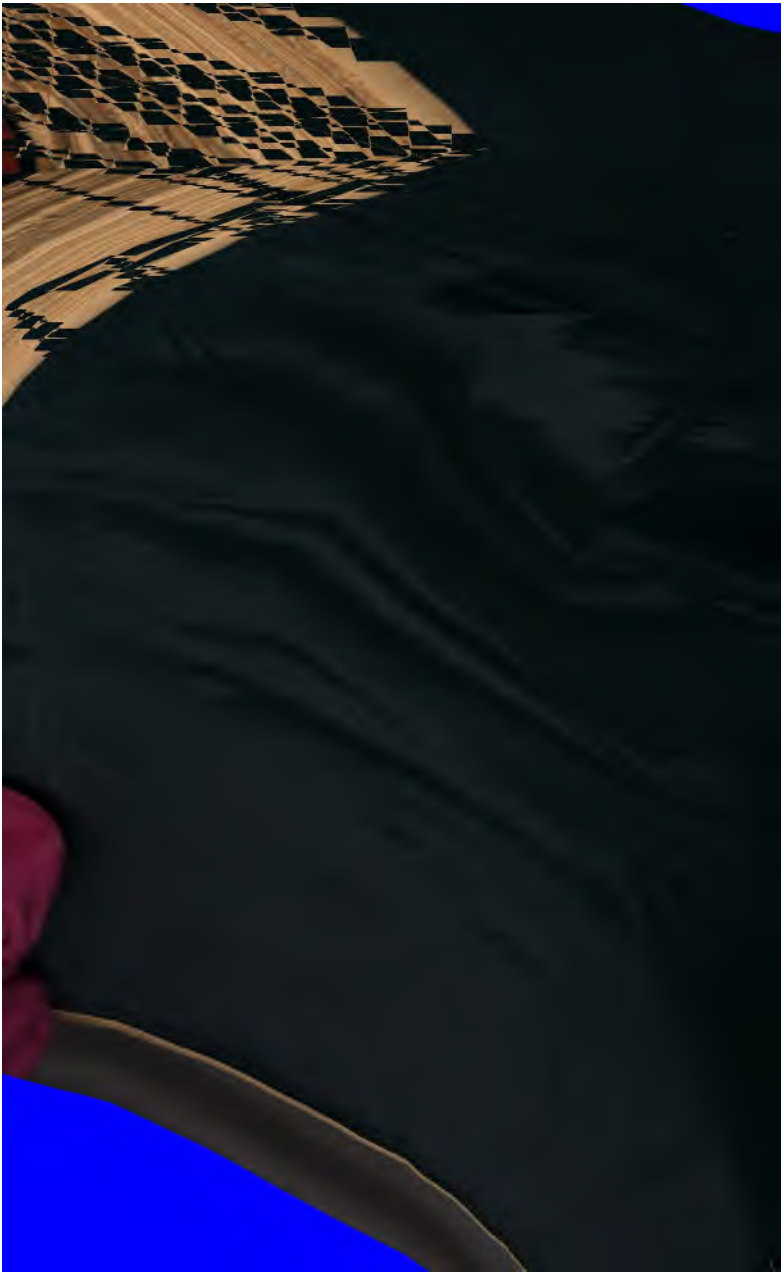

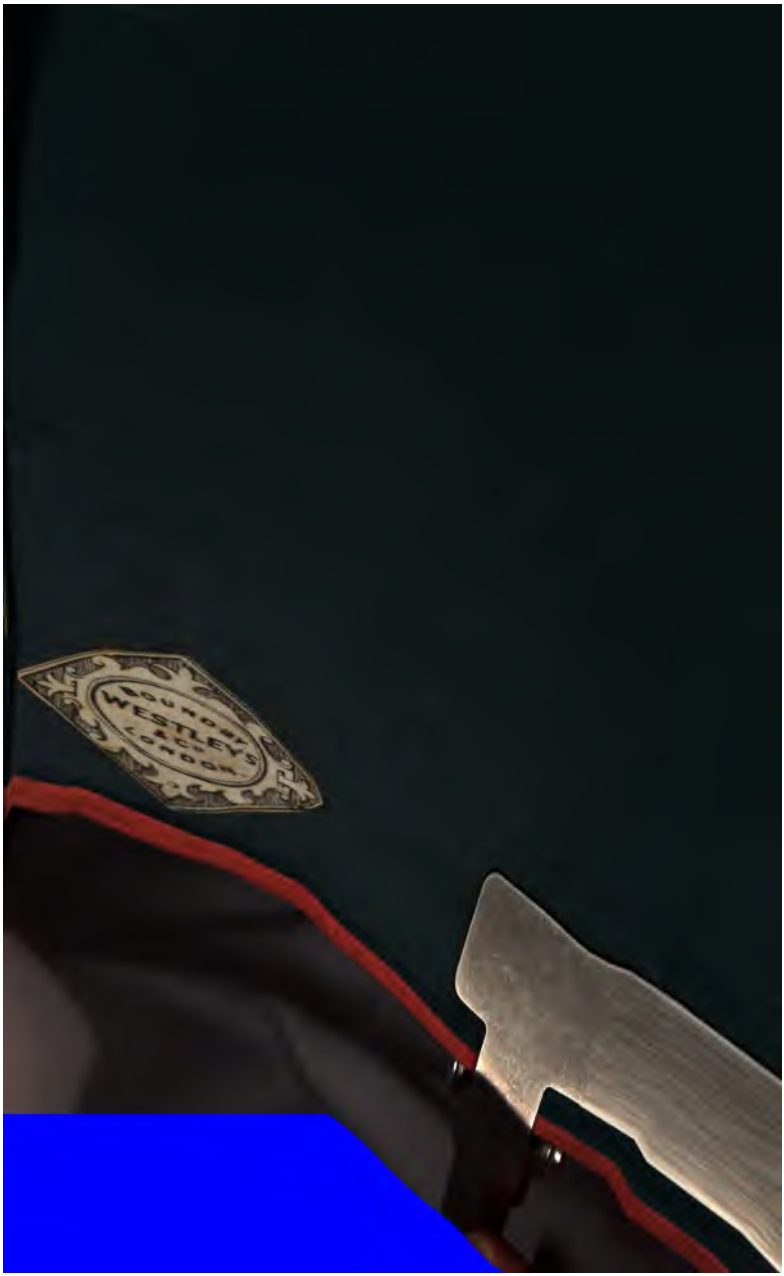
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